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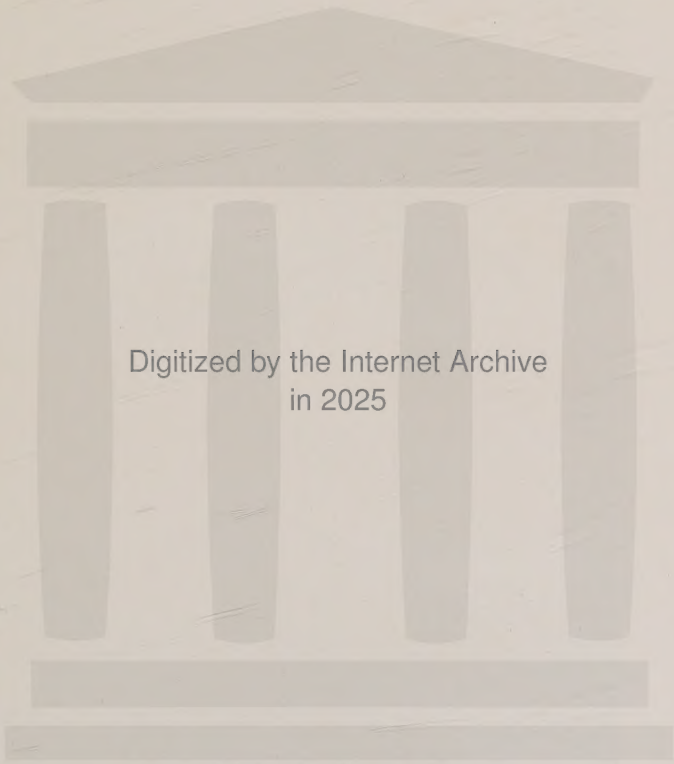
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Away to Fairyland

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STORIES FROM THE EARTHLY PARADISE

RETOLD FROM WILLIAM MORRIS

BY

MADALEN EDGAR M.A.

"In their times of idleness and ease
They told of poets' vain imaginings,
And memories vague of half-forgotten things,
Not true nor false, but sweet to think upon."

WILLIAM MORRIS

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	ix
THE MAN BORN TO BE KING	1
ATALANTA'S RACE	27
THE WRITING ON THE IMAGE	37
THE FOSTERING OF ASLAUG	43
BELLEROPHON AT ARGOS	61
BELLEROPHON IN LYCIA	74
THE PROUD KING	108
ACONTIUS AND CYDIPPE	126
OGIER THE DANE	132
THE GOLDEN APPLES	151
THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN	159
THE LADY OF THE LAND	188
THE STORY OF RHODOPE	196
THE LAND EAST OF THE SUN AND WEST OF THE MOON	215

ILLUSTRATIONS

		PAGE
AWAY TO FAIRYLAND . .	(*Chas. P. Sainton, R.I.*)	*Frontispiece*
"THE TRAVELLERS RODE IN SILENCE"	(*Evelyn Paul*) . .	10
"SHE NESTLED DOWN IN HIS ARMS"	(*Gertrude Demain Hammond, R.I.*) .	44
"ONCE MORE SHE TRIED TO WIN HIS LOVE"	(*Gertrude Demain Hammond, R.I.*) .	68
"THY PLACE HAVE I TAKEN FOR A DAY"	(*Gertrude Demain Hammond, R.I.*) .	124
"OGIER KNELT DOWN TO THANK GOD"	(*Gertrude Demain Hammond, R.I.*) .	136
THE GARDEN OF THE HESPERIDES .	(*Evelyn Paul*) . .	154
"SHE SAW THAT HE WAS LOOKING TENDERLY UPON HER" . .	(*Gertrude Demain Hammond, R.I.*) .	220

Introduction

"THE EARTHLY PARADISE," written between the years 1868 and 1870, is the most important of the poems of William Morris, the celebrated artist, craftsman, and author. This great work was the outcome of his admiration for Chaucer and his desire to write a collection of stories in verse, drawn from various sources and arranged, like "The Canterbury Tales," in an original setting. Just as Chaucer put his tales into the mouths of a band of pilgrims on their way to Canterbury, so Morris planned that the stories he selected for his cycle should be told by a company of sea-farers from Norway and certain Greeks, thrown together in their old age by the strange chances of fortune. The adventures which brought about their meeting form the substance of the Prologue to "The Earthly Paradise."

The scene of the Prologue is laid in an island, far west in the Atlantic, where a colony of Greeks had settled many centuries before, and where their descendants still retained their language, traditions, and religion. A band of Wanderers, grey-haired, travel-stained and dejected appear unexpectedly in the market-place of the Greeks who give them a kindly welcome. In answer to the questions of the islanders, Rolf the Norwegian tells how he and his company have spent the best years of their

lives in a fruitless search for a certain *earthly paradise*—a fair land of sunshine and unfading flowers, where, they fondly believed, sorrow and death were alike unknown.

Rolf and his two friends, Laurence, the Swabian priest, and Nicholas, the learned Breton, had often longed to go in quest of this deathless land, and when, one autumn, Norway was devastated by a dreadful pestilence, they determined to flee from the death-stricken country and seek at last the wondrous earthly paradise, which, Nicholas had read, lay somewhere in the far western ocean.

Sailors and men-at-arms to the number of eighty were found willing to set sail with them in the *Fighting Man*, given them by little Kirstin Erling, whose father, the master of the boat, had died of the plague, and who herself, for love of her good friend Nicholas, agreed to accompany them across the ocean.

Fearing to make known their intended flight lest they should be prevented from sailing by others who might be jealous of their escape, they stole away in their ship at midnight, and made for Bremen, where they bought great stores of food and armour, and also a second boat, by name the *Rose-Garland*. Then, in high hope, they sailed south-west between the shores of France and England, meeting upon their way the English king, Edward, who was anxious to employ them in an expedition against his enemy, the French ; but, on hearing the strange quest on which they were setting forth, he gave the leaders gifts, and suffered the little company to go upon their way unmolested.

Reaching the open sea, they sailed due west for many a weary day, till, after encountering a fierce storm in which they had almost perished, they at last sighted land. Great was their joy, on coming ashore, to find themselves

among trees and flowers so beautiful that they deemed they had reached a very paradise. The embalmed bodies of the kings of the land ranged round the walls of a temple, however, showed them that death was there as well as in Norway, and, disappointed in their expectations, they took to sea again.

Their next landing was disastrous, for, disembarking in a bay where no track of danger was visible, they gave themselves up to reckless feasting, and lay down to sleep in their unguarded tents. At dead of night they were surprised by a band of fierce savages, and before they could beat them back they lost three of their number, besides poor little Kirstin, who was found dead, with an arrow through her heart.

Hastily regaining their ships, they sailed along the coast, and at length landed amongst a simple and kindly folk. The weather becoming stormy, they thought it well to remain some weeks on shore, where the friendly natives brought them many gifts of fruit and game, while they, in return, built them substantial huts after the fashion of those in Norway. Still Rolf yearned to reach the paradise of his dreams, and as he gazed at the snow-clad mountains that lay to the west, he fondly hoped that beyond them might be found that blissful land. Nicholas and Laurence being of the same mind, the three friends, set out, with a number of their men-at-arms, and with immense difficulty crossed the frozen heights, only to find themselves in a country, bleak, barren, and inhabited by a savage race whose delight it was to feed on human flesh. Before they could retrace their steps, the Norsemen had, time and again, to repulse these cannibals; but at length, by dint of the utmost courage and perseverance, they succeeded in rejoining their comrades on the shore.

There was now dissension among the Wanderers, some of whom, seeing the folly of their quest, had wedded native wives and decided to spend the remainder of their days in the little haven of rest which they had found. Others, in despair of reaching any earthly paradise, set sail in the *Fighting Man*, to regain, if possible, their native land of Norway; while, with heavy hearts, the three leaders and some forty men, the faithful remnant of their band, embarked in the *Rose-Garland*, and went on their way southward.

For three years Rolf and his friends struggled on, sometimes driven far out to sea by storms, sometimes resting on shore, till one day they came to a pleasant land,[1] having in its midst a city, white-walled, and gay with painted houses and exquisite gardens, where they were received with more than kingly honours. Houses were given to them, slaves, too, and gold in abundance; and gladly they repaid the kindness of the people by aiding in their councils, and instructing them in the use of letters, the art of ship-building, and other useful crafts. Having enabled them to defeat a dreaded enemy, the Norsemen won the complete devotion of the natives of the country, and came to be looked upon as gods rather than men. For many a year they dwelt contented in that land, until approaching old age awakened in their breasts wistful

[1] It is worthy of note that the description which Morris gives of this country corresponds with what Cortés the Spaniard found in Mexico when he landed there in 1519. Morris speaks of a "tower foursquare lessening in stage on stage," which is exactly the *teocalli* or pyramidal temple of the Aztecs; and an excellent picture of that ancient and highly civilised race is given in his account of the people whose city contained magnificent buildings and gardens, who knew nothing of the use of iron, but fashioned their weapons of copper or flint, and whose hieroglyphics resembled those of the Egyptians. Here, as in his mention of Edward III., Morris lends an air of reality to his fiction by the introduction of historical facts.

thoughts of the paradise of eternal youth which, long ago, they had hoped to discover.

Just then a young man came to them secretly with wonderful tales of a far-distant country, where, said he, none grew old, and where, if any aged person arrived, he at once regained his youth. Pretending that he himself had been a grey-haired elder and had grown young again upon reaching those shores, the stranger rekindled the hopes of the Wanderers, and eagerly they followed him overseas towards their expected paradise. Alas for their hopes! They found too late that the young man's story was but a lure to bring them to a city where they were doomed to lifelong imprisonment within a strongly guarded temple, their captors believing that the presence of these far-famed, fair-skinned strangers would ensure the lasting good fortune of the nation. But the doors of their temple-prison were not to remain closed for ever. After what seemed to the Norsemen an endless lapse of time, they heard, one day, the din of battle in the streets, and finding their guards had fled before the advance of an invading force, they seized their armour, and escaped to the quay. There they took possession of a ship lying at anchor, and set sail unobserved, directing their course towards the land from which, in their folly, they had been beguiled.

Joyously they sailed southward, but their delight in recovered freedom was forgotten in their sorrow for the death of their good captain, Nicholas, who died upon the voyage, worn out with suffering and disappointment. After a time fierce winds arose, and drove them so far from shore that they had all but perished for lack of food and water. At last, however, they reached a land—not that for which they had steered, but the island in-

habited by the Greeks, and there the fisher-folk fed and housed them until their strength returned, and they were able to journey to the main city, to lay their case before the rulers of the colony.

Such was the story recited by Rolf in the market-place of the Greeks, whose language he spoke with ease, as his boyhood had been spent in Byzantium.

By this time the Wanderers had ceased to cherish the vain hope of an earthly paradise. They saw now that old age and death visited every region of the earth, and that, go where they might, they must in time submit to the fate of all mankind. Their one remaining wish was to gain a resting-place where they might spend the evening of their life in peace; and when, on hearing their story, the elders of the city pressed them to settle in their midst, they gladly did so, finding there as much of a paradise as is granted to men on earth.

Having made their home among the Greeks, they soon took a share in the business and the pleasures of their hosts, and nothing pleased them better than to sit with the elders of the city, talking over the legends of the Old World they had left so long ago. On a March day, when a banquet was being held in honour of the opening year, the high priest of the land arose and proposed—what was much to the liking of all—that at a feast to be given twice in each month throughout the new year one of their number should entertain the others with the recital of a story. His proposal being eagerly agreed to, the priest himself, by way of example, related that afternoon the tale of *Atalanta's Race*, and, two weeks later, one of the Norsemen followed with the old French romance of *The Man born to be King*.

In this way, then, the twenty-four stories of "The

Earthly Paradise" are linked together, one being told by a Greek, and one by a Norseman alternately.

Morris had an intense love of the Middle Ages, and, added to the fact that story-telling was then a common form of entertainment, this made it natural that he should choose some time in these far-past centuries as the date for the Prologue to his great poem. In the terrible plague, known as the Black Death, which ravaged Norway as well as many other countries in 1372, he found a suitable reason for his Wanderers setting forth upon their search for a deathless land. The stories they relate had therefore to be chosen from those current in Europe before the end of the fourteenth century. In keeping with the date at which they are supposed to be told, Morris infuses into his tales the very spirit of the Middle Ages, with its superstitious belief in magic, and its love of mystery and romance.

By including a Breton and a Swabian along with the Norsemen in his band of Wanderers, he was able to make use of the stories of France and Germany, as well as Scandinavia, while he introduced an Arabian tale through Rolf the Norwegian, whose early years in Byzantium had acquainted him with the legends of the East. In contrast with the variety of sources from which the Wanderers' tales are derived, those of their hosts are drawn from one only—the myths and traditions of ancient Greece. Morris represents these as having been handed down by the colonists from father to son through many generations, so that they had often been altered in details from the form in which they were first known; and further, as all his narrators, Greek and Norse alike, were grey-haired men, whose memories of things heard in youth may well have grown dim, he leaves himself free to make what

variations he pleases in the telling of these old-world legends, and to enrich with many a beautiful and original fancy of his own

> ' The gentle music of the bygone years,
> Long past to us with all their hopes and fears."

M. G. E.

The Man born to be King

IN the banqueting-hall of a large and beautiful palace sat a young King holding high festival amongst his courtiers. His peaceful, happy reign allowed him to foster learning at court, and as he had always gladly welcomed to his board any sage or philosopher from whom he might gain fresh knowledge, he was not surprised to see among his guests that afternoon a stranger who was clearly a man of some lore. Interested in the small wizened figure whose eyes flashed so brightly beneath his lofty forehead, the King ordered a servant to bring the new-comer before him when the meal was ended.

"Welcome, friend," said he; "'tis plain to me that you are wise above most men. Come, will you show us wherein your skill lies? Is it in minstrelsy, in knowledge of the stars, of herbs that bring healing to the sick, or in alchemy perchance?"

"O King," replied the stranger, "you see before you a humble watcher of the stars, one who, on the brink of the grave, looks back upon a lifetime of study that has brought him but small reward. Yet my toil has not been all in vain; I have learned many secrets that are hid from other men's eyes, and it is on purpose to make known to you one of the sure decrees of Fate that I have made this journey to your palace.

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"Think not, O King, that he who reigns after you shall be of royal stock; it is written in the starry heavens that the next to wear your crown shall be one of humble, yea of peasant birth."

The King started in dismay. He was proud of his lineage, and it was a cruel blow to hear that he should be the last of his race to sit upon the throne which had been his forefathers' through countless generations. Yet he was constrained to believe the prophecy when the man who thus interpreted the stars, told him also secrets of his past life which the King had wisely kept to himself.

"Nay, fear not that I shall betray what I have learned of your history in my night-watches," cried the sage, as the King arose, threatening to silence him for ever. "I spoke of those former deeds of yours but to prove the truth of my star-reading, and now that I have given you warning of what shall come to pass, believe me or not, as you please, O King. I have fulfilled my errand. Farewell."

Having ended his speech, the little man turned from the King's presence, and, quitting the palace, was heard of no more.

As to the King, this prophecy at first caused him great uneasiness, but as the months passed by it troubled him less and less, until at length it slipped entirely from his memory.

In course of time the young King wedded a Princess of a neighbouring land, and with his love for her and his many occupations, he found life happier than ever.

One autumn day it pleased him to lead his huntsmen to the forest. The chase was exciting, and the King, following hard upon the deer, found at nightfall that he had outstripped all his courtiers, and was alone in the

dense wood, far from his palace and without any chance of rejoining his men that night. He was preparing to make his bed among the bracken when a glimmering light in the distance attracted his attention. Leading his horse by the bridle, he made his way through the tangled undergrowth, until at length he reached a clearing among the trees, where stood a rude hut, from whose half-opened door shone the light that had guided him thither. In the doorway appeared a man, grim and sad of face, who, at the King's request for a night's lodging, made answer that no one should cross his threshold that evening, for his wife lay dying within ; but, he added, if the stranger liked, he might sleep in the shed close by, and he should have what fare the hut afforded.

Thankful for the shelter, such as it was, the King tied his horse to a post in the shed, and having eaten the supper of rye-bread and home-made wine, brought by his humble host, he lay down on his bed of dried fern, and fell at once into a deep slumber. Not long, however, did he sleep, for in his dreams he heard a shrill voice cry : "*Take ! Take !*" and he started up with a strange terror at his heart. Finding no cause for alarm he lay down again, but scarcely had sleep come to him a second time when he awoke in distress, hearing a new echo from his dreams : "*Give up ! Give up !*" Yet once more his rest was broken. He dreamed that the little old star-gazer bent over him to whisper, with a mocking smile : "*Take* and *Give up*—you hear the words ? The crown which old age will force you to give up, shall be taken by the child who is born to-night in this humble cottage."

These words still haunted him when he arose next morning and crossed to the hut. It was a sad sight that met his eyes there. On a heap of straw the woodman's

wife lay dead; her husband, lost in grief, knelt by her side, heedless of their little newborn son, who was wailing pitifully. The room was without a window, but light from the open door streamed in across the floor of hard-trodden earth; three logs of wood served as chairs, and a rough board laid on trestles was the only table. A more miserable home it would have been hard to find in that country, but the King thought little of the misery before him, as he stood gazing curiously at the infant and brooding over his late dreams. Fierce anger instead of pity filled his heart. Was his own royal line doomed indeed to perish, and this child, son of a poverty-stricken peasant, destined to rise to the throne? The sound of a horn broke in upon his jealous musings, and, recognising the blast, he sprang to the door, and gave an answering shout, which soon brought his followers to the spot.

The woodman turned to gaze dully upon the gay troop who flocked into his hut, and who, to his bewilderment, greeted his unexacting guest of last night as their sovereign lord.

"Thanks to this good fellow," said the King to his huntsmen, "I found both food and shelter overnight. We must reward him handsomely for his hospitality, and in no way can we do so more fitly, methinks, than by taking his motherless child off his hands to rear at court. "Wouldst have the boy trained to be a trusty little page?" he asked, turning to the woodman, who had by this time relapsed into his former indifference, too stupefied with grief to notice the anxiety which the King strove to conceal beneath these seemingly careless words. The poor man roused himself so far as to thank the King for his offer, and knowing that without a mother the child would fare badly in his desolate hut, he agreed that the infant

should be carried at once by the huntsmen to the royal palace.

A wooden box was found and a handful of hay placed in it. Then the father having laid his little one in this rough cradle, a squire came forward, and gently lifted the burden to his saddle-bow. The King fairly trembled in his eagerness to ride off with his new-born rival. He mounted his horse the moment it was brought to the door, and, handing a courtier some gold for the woodman, dashed at the head of his troop into the dark wood. A minute later one man alone stood by the hut. It was he whose wife lay dead within and whose little son had been borne thus suddenly from his sight. He stopped to count the gold pieces that now lay glittering in his hand, and as he counted them his future lay plain before him. He would pay the priests to say prayers over his dead, and then, bidding farewell for ever to this forest, he would wander far into other lands, there to forget the tragedy of his woodland home.

Meantime the King rode with his huntsmen through the forest until they reached its farther edge, where the open country stretched before them, and in the distance a deep stream lay like a silver band across their path. Then turning in his saddle, "Ride on, sirs," he cried, "and leave with me Samuel, the squire who has the infant in his charge. It is my will to visit these fields in the valley and note the harvest there. Down by the stream we may perchance find a farm-house at which to leave the child to be nursed, until he be of age to come to our palace."

The men rode on at the word, the King watching until the last of their green coats had disappeared between the high hedgerows, when he called the old squire

to his side. Samuel, like his father before him, had served at court long and faithfully, so with full confidence the King now told him of the prophecy read from the stars, his dreams last night, and his fears that the babe they carried was fated to be his successor on the throne. "But not if I can help it, shall this weak infant grow to manhood," continued the King. "I am taking you with me to yonder bridge, where you shall drop the child in his box-cradle into the water. I would not indeed shed his blood; but only if Heaven intervenes on his behalf, shall he escape death to-day."

The old squire made a feeble remonstrance: "Doubtless, my lord, you plan wisely, for if it is I who cast the boy into the stream the guilt is mine, not yours, and willingly, as you know, would I do graver deeds than this to please my sovereign. But after all, will not the ark be rescued by some passer-by? Better, I pray you, sire, leave things as they are, nor struggle against Fate."

"Nay," returned the King firmly. "Let me but see the cradle swept into the eddies of the river and I shall have no more fear of the wise man's prophecies."

Without further discussion the two horsemen rode forward to the river, where the King, crossing the bridge, watched the squire stop midway and raise from his saddle-bow the box which held the infant. On one side of the white wooden cradle he noticed that a lion had been roughly painted in red. Next moment he heard a splash, and a cry from the wakened child; he saw the cradle whirling in mid-stream, and then, with his squire by his side, he turned, and rode swiftly from the bank. With seeming carelessness he chatted to Samuel as they pursued their way; and if their light talk did not banish the thoughts that troubled him, these were put to flight by

the news that awaited him at the palace. An infant daughter had been born to him the night before, and his delight in the little Princess Cecily soon drove from his mind the memory of the other child born that same night.

Fourteen years passed. Once more, on an autumn day, the King found himself beside the stream where he and his squire had done their cruel deed, but this time he was not alone with Samuel. He and his courtiers had spent the morning flying their falcons till, tired of sport, they halted at midday to rest on the river's bank, close by a mill. The splash of the mill-wheel was a pleasant sound in the miller's orchard; the apple-trees, heavy with fruit, threw a welcome shadow on the grass; and a picture of quiet charm lay before them in the group of quaint old buildings, on whose roofs the doves sat cooing gently.

No better spot than the orchard could they have found for their noonday rest. On seeing them dismount, the miller himself came hurrying to the party with fruit, junkets, and cream for their refreshment, and led the way to the shadiest spot beneath the trees. Now, the miller was short and fat, and his round red face far from handsome. By his side walked a boy, tall, seemingly, for his years, in face so different from the miller that the King on seeing them together smiled at the contrast. That grey-eyed lad can hardly be his son, thought he. "Does your boy get his good looks from his mother?" he asked his bustling host.

"Nay, sire, that I cannot tell, for he is not our child, and we know nothing of his parents. 'Twas this time fourteen years ago that my wife found him and brought him to our home, an infant that must else have died in the river." With these few words the miller disappeared

through the orchard; while the boy remained standing before the King, astonished to see a look of acute anxiety and then of horror upon the royal face as the miller gave his reply.

Scarcely had the King recovered his self-command than he had to listen to a story that proved his fears were all too true. Back came the miller. He had summoned his wife to relate how the child was found on that long-past September day.

Riding along the river-bank, said the woman, on her way home from market, she had heard a feeble cry, and tracing the sound to a wooden case entangled mid-stream in weeds, she waded out to the object, and lifted from the ark a little naked infant who lay there wailing with cold and hunger. From the day that she had brought him home, her husband and she had loved him as their own child. "And here, O King," she ended, "is the chest in which I found our Michael."

There was no need for the King to look at the box which she drew from beneath her shawl. He knew beforehand what it would be. Yes, there it was, fashioned of rough white wood, and on one of its sides a lion painted in red colours that had not faded.

Trusting that no one but old Samuel shared the secret with him, the King managed to conceal his painful interest in the story he had heard from the miller's wife. But after he had returned to the palace, he waited only till the morrow to call the old squire to his private chamber. Having been closeted with his master for a long time, Samuel at length came out, muttering angrily about the foolish fancies of kings, called for a horse, and galloped straightway to the mill.

By the side of the mill-pond lay the boy whose destiny

vexed the King. As he idly watched his bait float in the water, his thoughts turned to yesterday's talk, his unknown parentage, and the strange expression which the King wore while the miller spoke of his adoption. Why should his sovereign's countenance have changed as it did? Might it not be that he, the so-called son of the miller, was of noble lineage, and that the King would one day call him to play his proper part at court? What great deeds he would do if he were a knight!

In the midst of these day-dreams the boy saw the King's squire ride up to the mill. The courtier's dress was heavy with gold, his sword glittered by his side, while fastened in his doublet there gleamed a knife of rare workmanship. On its golden hilt was an inlaid spray of green leaves, round which a silver scroll bore the words, dark in meaning as in their lettering: *Strike! for no dead man cometh back!*

Michael sprang to his feet as the horseman drew rein to ask for the master of the house. The sight of the gaily dressed courtier was in keeping with the day-dreams in which the boy had just been indulging. Could this be a messenger to call him to the palace?

Samuel saw the boy's handsome face aglow with excitement, and beneath his breath he muttered: "Truly, the lad is fated to make his mark! 'Tis folly to think that we can push him from the throne."

The miller found, a scroll was given him by the King's squire, but to read the message was beyond the goodman's power. The courtier smiled: "No matter though you cannot read the words; you see the King's seal on the letter, and from that you may know that it is in truth his royal command. The orders which he sends are briefly these: it is his pleasure that the boy whom you have

housed so many years come now with me to court and enter his service as a page."

The miller's cheerful face turned sad. He stood for some time, twisting his dusty cap between his fingers before he ventured a reply. "Well, be it so," he said at length; "I cannot hold back the lad, since he is no more my son than the King's, yet I had hoped to see him grow to manhood in the old mill. I meant him to be miller when I was past work, and I had even looked him out a pretty wife against the time when he should be master here. He is my right hand already, but, sore though he will be missed, I judge we must let him go with you, sir."

Michael had been meantime standing apart, dazed by the King's message. To his fancy it seemed that life itself was changing as fast as his dreams. Gazing at the grey, wind-swept hill behind the miller's house, he could believe he saw a new country, with strange figures flitting across the long slopes, himself a knight riding to do battle with grim enemies upon these fields. Samuel's harsh voice recalled him to his senses, and he caught the sneering words: "A fine life you have planned for the lad! But what suits you, miller, might not please one of better birth—as the child's looks prove him to be, says my master. Tell me, my boy," he went on, turning to Michael, "which seems best—mill or palace, eh?"

"Indeed, sir, I have been happy here," stammered the boy, now fully alive to what was going on around him. "We have good fishing in our stream, and I never weary of my bow and arrows. Next June, our ranger says, I may quite well enter for the archer's prize at the town fair. Oh, all the year round there is something to entertain us."

This answer only amused Samuel, as the miller's words

"The travellers rode in silence"

had done before. "That is a peasant's notion of pleasure; you will soon learn better. Here, miller, is a bag of gold to pay you for the lad, whom you are not to see again. You need not look for him to come back from court to visit his humble friends, so boast not to the neighbours of his rise in life: the less said the better."

The miller gave poor Michael a kindly farewell, while his wife flung her arms round the boy. "'Tis hard to say good-bye," she whispered. "You seemed our own son, Michael, and made our home so happy. Well, well, God bless you in your new life, child."

"Come, now," Samuel broke in. "It is getting late, and we must be off, if this brave young knight is to reach the palace in daylight."

Torn between his love of the old life and his eagerness for the new, Michael crossed the stream, and climbed to his seat on horseback behind the squire. The courtier's mocking talk had hurt him as much as parting with his kind-hearted old foster-parents; but Samuel did not vex him with further sneers, and ere long he had recovered his spirits.

In silence the travellers rode along the sedgy river-side until they reached the forking of the highway. Instead of taking the main road in the direction of the King's palace, Samuel now turned his horse sharply across the bridge on to the other road which ran from the valley up to the edge of the pine forest. Little did Michael know that he had once before been carried on the squire's horse along that road, and that for a wicked purpose Samuel had then halted upon the bridge over which they clattered swiftly and noisily to-day.

"Are we to find the King somewhere in the woods?" asked the boy, surprised at the direction they had taken.

"Seeing that he is free to go where he pleases, you need not be astonished, need you, to learn that to-day he is visiting the black monks beyond the forest?"

Unheard by Michael the old squire murmured peevishly: "Ill betide him, I say, king though he be! Why should he compel me to do an ugly deed of this sort? It were more fitting for me to rest at home, and buy Heaven's pardon for all the misdeeds I have already done to humour him."

It was not long before the stout war-horse bore them to the uplands where the forest began. With a last glance down upon the sunny cornfields of the valley, Michael turned his eyes to the wood, which, thought he, might well have sheltered trolls, fairies, or giant wood-cutters, so dark it was, so unnaturally still. As they rode forward beneath the firs, drowsiness crept over him, and he ceased to notice where they were going. It was only when he felt the daylight grow brighter that he looked up, and found that they had crossed the wood and were now on the point of descending a rough, gravelly hill. Beyond the brushwood that fringed the lower slopes a few stunted alders and thick beds of rushes marked the windings of a sluggish stream, from whose oozy banks came the low, booming cry of the bittern. On the other side of the valley the ground rose steeply, topped by a mass of oak and holly trees, that made a heavy screen behind the dreary and forbidding foreground.

"Step to the ground," ordered Samuel as they left the wood, "the horse will find our weight too much here." So Michael walked downhill beside the rider, singing, as he went, some snatches of old country songs, and too happy in his own thoughts to notice that his companion was shifting uneasily in his saddle and fingering his knife.

Even the hoarseness of the squire's voice did not put him on his guard when he heard Samuel's next words : " Come, lad, and tighten these girths."

He bent down by the side of the old courtier to do as he was bid. Then Samuel raised his knife, and plunged it in the boy's side. Staggering backward with a cry, Michael fell heavily on the ground. His eyes were turned towards the treacherous squire, who, deadly pale, sprang from his horse to deal a second blow, if need be. But even as he stooped over the boy, and felt his heart still beating, the faint tinkling of a bell reached the old man's ears, and with a shudder he dropped the knife, and started to his feet. What was that tolling ? Was it the avenging angel drawing near to strike him as he had struck Michael ? Again the evening breeze swept the sound across the valley, and now, frenzied with terror and conscience-stricken, Samuel flung himself into the saddle. Clutching the reins tight, he spurred his horse uphill, dashed through the woods, and in the darkness of evening gained the road along which he had twice carried Michael to face death. At the bridge his outwearied horse stumbled, and fell dead; then, dazed with the horror of the boy's blood upon his hands, the old squire wandered aimlessly all night long, till by sunrise he found himself at the palace gates.

In the early morning he sought the King's presence, and told his story. " I own," he ended, " that I did not stand near and watch the boy breathe his last, but assuredly that tolling bell marked the approach of the angel of death, who must have borne away his spirit to another world. Believe me, O sire, that your young rival will trouble you no more."

The King frowned angrily. " I thought that I had sent

a man of mettle to do my work, but it seems I chose only a poor weakling, whose hands tremble when they grasp a knife. Death of my life! I doubt if your lordship ever struck the lad!"

Second thoughts, however, satisfied the King that Michael must have died of his wound, and once more he comforted himself that his crown would never pass to the woodman's son.

In return for his day's work Samuel received rich gifts from his master; but the old courtier was tired of his lifelong service of flattery and wickedness, and before many months were over, his spirit passed to its solemn account, and the last earthly honours were paid to his body in the minster.

Princess Cecily had neither brother nor sister, and when she was eighteen years old she lost her mother. That a pleasant stepmother soon took the place of the late Queen mattered little to the Princess, however, for the King had arranged that Cecily should leave her home that autumn and become the bride of a neighbouring prince. The month before her marriage was to be spent at a quiet country house of the King's, whither he would bring the young prince to see his bride for the first time a few days before their wedding.

The very day that Cecily wished her father farewell and set out with her attendants to the Rose Castle, there came to visit the King, Peter, the old Abbot from the far side of the forest, with his sub-prior Adrian, five other monks, and a body of ten serving-men. Their business dispatched, the King invited the party to stay and sup at the palace. "I would we had every day as tall men as yours at our table, Lord Abbot," he said carelessly as he

glanced at the armed men. On a sudden he felt as if he must be dreaming, for beneath one of the ten helmets there looked out a pair of bright eyes which last he had seen fixed on him four years ago in the miller's orchard, and which since that autumn he had fancied were closed in death! "Raise that steel cap, and let me see you better," he ordered, pointing towards Michael amongst the men-at-arms. "I seem to know your face. Tell me your history, my man."

Then Michael stood forward, a handsome, well-built man, his golden hair curling around a bright, sun-burnt face, and in a clear voice he told the story of his leaving the mill, and how in that lonely valley beyond the forest his companion had tried to take his life. At this point the tale was taken up by the sub-prior.

"It was that evening I was called to visit a poor charcoal-burner on his death-bed. As I bore the Host with me on my mule, I bade the boy who was to guide me to the hut, ring by my side a bell to warn all hearers of the Holy Presence on the road. The daylight was fading as we threaded our way beneath the pines, though the skirts of the wood were still bright with sunset colours. The lad beside me was chattering foolishly of trolls and elves. Just then we heard the thud of a horse's hoofs galloping amain in the forest.

"The foolish child cried out that some spirit of the woods was rushing past, but I silenced him, holding up the Presence which never fails to guard us from danger, and we pressed forward again. We left the wood, and turned down the hillside, where the sound of the horse's hoofs was lost to our ears. At the foot of the slope we saw a figure stretched across our path. It was this Michael, our dear son, who, as he has told you, my lord,

was sadly wounded. He lay with a knife in his side, while his blood flowed in a dark red stream upon the grass. We lifted him to the mule's back, and so brought him through the oaks and hollies of the next wood to the charcoal-burner's cottage—a poor dark hovel, which you may have marked, O King, while hunting in that part of the forest. The ruins of a cattle shed stand by its side, and no other building is in sight. In that hut I dressed our Michael's wound. I shrived the poor man to whom I had been brought (though indeed there was no call to do so, seeing that his illness was not unto death). Then when I left my two sick friends there next morning, a leech was sent in my place, and under his care Michael soon recovered. He joined us at the abbey, where we taught him letters, thinking to see him a monk in after years. But bright though he is at books, and anxious to please us whom he loves, yet he cares not to take holy vows. Therefore our Father Abbot declared that he might serve God with the sword since he likes not the beads, and he was given a place amongst our fighting men. The knife he wears is the one which his false friend thrust in his side. Let the King see the blade, Michael."

The King's face had grown pale with anxiety, his eyes were wild, and his voice, when next he spoke, sounded harsh and rasping. "My Lord Abbot," he said, "methinks your man-at-arms looks better suited to live at court than in the abbey. Could you part with him, think you?"

He hardly listened to the Abbot's assent. In Michael's hand he saw the knife which he himself had given to his squire that autumn morning. And as he stared at the words on the hilt: "*Strike! for no dead man cometh back!*" he forgot everything before him, and in despair his mind

wandered back to the prophecy that the lad, whom twice he had given over to death, was destined to be king.

Michael had been but ten days in service at the palace when the King sent for him, and, holding out a sealed letter, told him that he was to ride south to the Rose Castle, where the Princess Cecily was living, and there deliver his note to the seneschal. "The journey can be done in three days," said he. "My captain, Hugh, shall ride with you the first day to show you the road. Be true to your trust, my man, and this ride may change your fortunes."

In his heart the King hoped that Hugh would raise a quarrel with the new squire, and end the dispute by the sword, for no young man-at-arms could possibly escape death if he came to blows with that burly captain. But though Hugh, dark-browed and black-hearted, was a most disagreeable and insolent comrade, Michael controlled his temper, and thus an open quarrel was avoided. At the cross roads where they parted, the captain bowed low in his saddle, and raised his plumed hat with mock ceremony: "Farewell, sweet lord. You press on southward to win some prize—an earl's coronet perchance? Better that than the Princess's favour, which, I beg you to remember, is apt to lead to the dungeon."

Of this Michael took no more notice than of the many other gibes that Hugh had already flung in his face. But how glad he felt to be quit of his companion and free to ride alone along the sweet country roads! After a night's rest at a village inn, he set out again in the early morning when the grass was sparkling with dew, and spiders' gossamer hung grey upon the hedges. Another day was spent in the saddle; another night he slept at a wayside hostel. Some six hours' riding on the third morning brought him

across a bleak tableland, and then to his joy he gained the edge, from which he looked down upon the valley, where, beneath the haze of an autumn noonday, shone the grey towers of the Rose Castle. In the cornfields the harvesters were busy with the sickle, and sight and sounds alike reminded him of the happy days he had spent as a boy at the old mill. How far away were those scenes of his childhood!

Betwixt vineyards and fields of yellow corn he passed to the castle, where he found the gates standing open, and the drawbridge let down, as apparently it had been for years past. In the moat beneath his feet he saw shoals of goldfish lying amongst the water-lilies; while, as undisturbed and peaceful as the goldfish, in the archway lay the warder fast asleep, with his hand upon a harp. The quiet was broken by the sound of Michael's horse clattering across the drawbridge, and the warder arose, stretching himself lazily, to challenge the rider. Then Michael, showing his badge of the King's service, asked to see the seneschal immediately that he might deliver his master's scroll.

"He is too busy feasting in the hall to attend to any message at this moment, so you must wait a while, friend. Come," continued the warder, picking up his harp eagerly, "you shall sit down and hear my best song, *The Kaiser lieth on his Bier*. Don't tell me you have never heard of that famous Red Beard! Why, man, it is a real treat to listen to that ballad. And when you have had the *Kaiser*, I can give you some other very pretty pieces too—oh, well, if you don't want to listen, I am not going to force my minstrelsy on you. Perhaps you would rather go and rest in the old pleasance? You have only to cross the drawbridge, go down the stone

steps on the left to the falconer's path, and at the end of that you will see the wicket-gate that opens into the gardens."

Michael thanked him for his second proposal, which at that moment was more attractive to the way-worn traveller than the first. He promised, however, to come and hear the ballads another day; then, giving over his horse to a stable-boy, he wandered into the pleasance. The wealth of golden and crimson fruit against the old stone walls, the soft grass paths, and the drowsy play of a fountain in the midst of the lawn—all that the gardens contained was an enchantment to Michael. Some old song of his boyhood rose now and again to his lips; soothed by the sights and sounds around him, he threw himself down on the grass beside the fountain, and there he fell asleep.

The Rose Castle sheltered a band of very happy maidens that autumn month. Princess Cecily was there, prepared to do her father's will by marrying the unknown suitor when the King should bring him to the castle, but in the meantime no idle dreams about a lover distracted her thoughts from the simple pleasures of her daily life. Surrounded by her girl friends, she wished no greater happiness than they all enjoyed from day to day in that peaceful country house; a husband, she believed, could not make her life more pleasant than it was already.

This afternoon she slipped into the pleasance with her favourite companion, Lady Agnes, and chatting merrily the two girls came towards the fountain beside which Michael lay asleep. It was Agnes who caught sight of his form in the grass, and though she glanced at first but

carelessly, she was surprised into taking a longer survey the next minute.

The Princess, who had passed on without her, heard her excited voice praying her to turn back.

"Come," she whispered, "come and see the young prince whom our gracious King has chosen to be your bridegroom. Did I not tell you he would come himself to woo you? See, he is sleeping by the mid-fountain, dressed in the guise of a court servant."

Cecily frowned a little, and drew herself up. "Indeed, I have no wish to see my future husband," she said coldly. "Not that I will refuse my hand if my father wishes me to marry, but for my part I would rather escape wedlock; I shall have duties enough when I, my parents' only child, am crowned Queen of this country."

Little Lady Agnes tapped the ground impatiently with her foot. "I have heard you say all that before, dear Princess, but I am sure you will think differently when you see this handsome suitor who has dropped from the skies. Let us run back before he takes wing to fly away." And, seizing her mistress by the hand, she actually dragged her back to the fountain.

Cecily turned with heightened colour and a quicker breath, but there was no tenderness in her eyes when she first bent over the sleeping horseman. Yet as she gazed on his handsome features and manly, well-built figure, love all of a sudden stirred within her heart. She never doubted that the noble-looking stranger, whose dusty dress showed he had travelled a great distance, was, as Agnes had concluded, the bridegroom chosen for her by the King himself; and that he should have come in disguise to do his wooing, pleased her fancy the more she thought it over.

She was looking down upon him with strange, shy delight when her companion, with a stifled cry of horror, turned to her, and held out a scroll of parchment. It was the King's letter to the seneschal which, falling from Michael's pocket, Lady Agnes had picked up and opened. Cecily noted her father's name and seal upon the scroll, and yet hardly could she believe that he had sent the message when she read :—

"To the Lord Seneschal of Our Rose Castle, greeting.

"The King biddeth thee instantly put to death the traitor who beareth this note. Let his head be set upon a spear at the crossways before the castle, and there let it remain until we see it on our passing—so perish the King's enemies."

"Can we not save his life, Princess?" sobbed Lady Agnes

"Yes," replied Cecily, her lips white but firmly set. "I am going to find a way to save him, and while I am absent, Agnes, you must watch by his side. If others enter the pleasance, waken him, warn him of the danger, and urge him to conceal himself."

She turned again to look tenderly at Michael before she left the pleasance. An hour ago she had not known what love could mean, and now she was ready to risk deep disgrace, to give her life even, if only she could save this stranger!

Then she ran to her own room in the castle, hastening all the more because her squires and attendants would soon be coming out of the dining-hall, and she feared to meet them lest they should notice the letter which she was carrying. Amongst her books she found a scroll that was signed and sealed by the King but had been left

blank. Upon this she wrote with a firm, clerkly hand the words :—

" Kind greetings from the King unto Sir Rafe, Seneschal of Our Rose Castle.

" It is our will that the Princess Cicely be wedded to the bearer of this scroll. Question him not about his name or race ; sufficient to you that we know him well and are pleased to make him our heir. Let the wedding be held the same day on which you receive our order, and let the bridegroom be acknowledged by all as master and future King."

Closing this letter, and carefully burning the grim order which she had borne away from Michael, the Princess ran back to the pleasance. Happily, she met none of her people upon the way ; and Agnes, awaiting her anxiously, took the freshly written scroll at her command, and thrust it into the sleeper's belt in the place where the death warrant had lain.

No sooner had the Princess accomplished the plot than her courage gave way. She turned aside, pale and trembling, to think that she had defied her father's will and committed herself to marry in a few hours the stranger who had been sentenced to a shameful death. Aroused by a soft touch upon her arm, she let herself be drawn gently to the farther end of the pleasance, where her lady-in-waiting cheered her with hopeful words.

" If you will take the wine and fruit which I have just brought to the bower," said Lady Agnes, returning after a few minutes' absence, " I will sit by your feet and tell you my thoughts, Princess. It seems to my mind that there is naught to shame you in wedding this gallant and brave-looking young squire. I remember once hearing that a seer had foretold your husband should be of humble

birth, so why should we fear what is, after all, Heaven's will? He is of noble mould, we can see, and is not that of more value than noble race? Be sure, dear Princess, that all will go well. Listen! I hear Sir Rafe and his train coming, no doubt to break to you news that we already know. We must play our part bravely."

Cecily hearkened to the seneschal's message with such grave interest that her lords never doubted but that their tidings took her by surprise. With maidenly dignity she answered that she was ready to do what was required of her that day by her lord the King, and, followed by her train of attendants, she presently entered the great hall where Sir Rafe had arranged that she should meet her bridegroom. Hitherto, in sight of her people, she had moved with the stateliness of a princess, but now as she advanced towards the dais, a bright flush rose to her cheeks, her eyes fell shyly, and an unwonted timidity took possession of her, because there, at the end of the hall, stood Michael, her chosen bridegroom, the man whom so lately she had saved from death. He still wore his travel-stained riding-dress, with her father's badge upon his breast; and though he himself could hardly believe that the King's orders were true, the lords at the Rose Castle were not astonished at his good fortune when they beheld his frank and noble bearing. The strange tidings, which had as yet only perplexed him, gave rise on the instant he saw the Princess to visions of surpassing happiness. As she had loved him at first sight, so he in his turn worshipped her winsome face before he had even heard her voice.

In simple words she bade him welcome to the castle, and told him modestly that, as her father approved him so highly, she would trustfully give him her hand, knowing

that the King's choice was well. "And may you make my days as happy as I would fain make yours," she ended wistfully.

Michael's voice was very tender as he thanked her for her words and told her how eagerly he longed to show his gratitude to the King for this undreamed-of favour. And if he would give his life for such a kind master, what could he offer to a bride whom he already adored? In their wedded life he would give her all that was his to give—honour and love unmeasured—and he prayed God that she would find him ever a true helpmate.

Then amid the ringing of the chapel bells and the solemn chanting of the choir, the bishop moved forward to the altar, where he united Cecily and Michael in a happy bond which henceforth no man could rend asunder.

On a crisp autumn morning, when the cornfields and vineyards stood bare and the yellow leaves were falling thick upon his path, the King came riding slowly towards the Rose Castle. It was the day on which he had intended to bring Cecily her royal bridegroom, but alas for his plans! news had reached him that his intended son-in-law had been slain in some petty war. He came, therefore, only to tell his daughter of her loss. He was drawing near the cross roads, where he looked to see Michael's head fixed on the spear, when he heard the sound of music and the prancing of many horses. This somewhat surprised him until he reflected that the tumult might arise from a welcome prepared for the young prince whom he had hoped to bring with him to-day. Just then he turned a sharp corner and came in sight of the crossways, where, behold! no rival's transfixed head, but the gayest of pageants awaited him. Heading the procession came

a band of sweet-voiced maidens, dressed in gold and white robes ; next minstrels, lords, knights, archers, and swordsmen, with noise of martial music and of clashing arms. It was with very grave misgivings that the King drew rein to await the explanation of this brilliant spectacle. The crowds parted. Between the two long lines of attendants walked Michael and Cecily hand-in-hand towards the horror-stricken King. Not even his irate Majesty could deny that they were well matched, for they looked equally noble and handsome as they came forward in their royal robes, beneath a banner borne by two ancient knights. Unable to look into the eyes of the radiant couple as they reached his side, the King scowled above their heads at the old seneschal, who stood in the background. "What means this tom-foolery, Sir Rafe ? " he shouted gruffly.

Cecily felt herself turn pale and faint ; she clasped Michael's hand very tightly ; but before anyone could answer him, the King went on : "So my young messenger got here safely enough ? "

"Oh yes, your Majesty," replied old Sir Rafe, thankful to hear this simpler question ; "and, following your orders, I saw the Princess wedded to him that same afternoon."

The King sat silent in his saddle. "Too late, too late now to struggle against Fate's decree," ran his thoughts. "My only child is mated to him ; they must share my throne as they share all else. Ah, why did I embitter my days by this vain struggle to put down him who was born to rise to the throne ? The woodman's son shall be my heir. I will yield to Fate, give up these useless plots against his life, and spend my remaining days free of the vexation that has oppressed me, time and again, these twenty years."

The battle with his feelings was successfully tought in less time than it takes to record, and the King's face relaxed. Turning to his people with a smile, he cried: "Long live my two children! Behold Prince Michael, your new King! From this time forward he shall share the throne with me, and when I go to join my fathers, he shall reign in my stead. It pleases me to see that you have already done him honour by this pageant, which, I own, took me at first by surprise. The more you see of our Prince the more you will honour him; and let me tell you now that he comes of a race that is no less ancient than our own, for ere the ancient city of Damascus was founded his forefathers had dwelt in the far East for many a generation. Think not the less of your new master, then, because he came in the guise of a squire unto the Rose Castle. I have tried him by the severest tests, and have ever found him brave, noble, and wise."

Then, leaping from his horse, the King hailed the seneschal; and in return, he declared, for his trusty services in uniting the two young people, he raised him to the rank of a duke. Thereafter he offered a hand to Cecily and to Michael, and joyfully, through the midst of applauding crowds, they passed together to the beautiful old Rose Castle.

Long and happily the old monarch and his children lived in that fair kingdom, and of all who ever wore its crown, none was more honoured and beloved of the people than King Michael, the woodman's son.

Atalanta's Race

THE town of King Schœneus lay bathed in a flood of April sunshine, when a noble young huntsman, tired of his sport in the deep forest, wandered through its unguarded gateway. It surprised him to find the streets deserted, but before long he discovered the reason. Towards one quarter of the city crowds were streaming with grave faces and many anxious words. Filled with curiosity young Milanion joined the throng, and presently found himself on an open space where tiers of seats looked down on a race-course that curved round the turning-post at its middle point. Beneath a canopy King Schœneus sat enthroned in the midst of his councillors, while close by his throne stood a golden image of the sun-god Apollo, and a silver image of the goddess of the moon, Diana. A brazen altar was there, and at the side of it a giant-like man held a sword, against whose shining steel was laid a wreath of yellow flowers. A herald was also on the scene—a herald in gold and crimson array, with his horn even now raised to his lips.

But it was the sight of the runners in the coming race that most interested Milanion. There were but two of them, bending foot to foot at the starting-point. The one, a young man of a slim, well-knit figure, his crisp locks crowned with a small golden circlet, and in his

hand an olive branch, that betokened his prayers for a happy, peaceful ending to the contest. He was trembling with excitement, and his eyes were bent longingly and anxiously upon his rival in the race. Unlike the first, the other combatant showed a calmness that would have been remarkable in any man facing such an ordeal, but was the more so in that it was here displayed by a young girl! She stood there, tall and supple, her grey eyes untroubled, and her smooth, white brow free from any trace of anxiety.

It was now sundown, and as the great fiery globe dropped beneath the western sky-line, the herald blew a loud blast on his horn, and instantly a little cloud of dust rose from the track down which man and maiden sprang from the line. Their course was swift as the wind. Side by side they rounded the turning-post at the farther end, and when the onlookers saw that they were still abreast, and the race already half run, cries of joy arose, and the crowds shouted words of encouragement, all directed towards the young man. Milanion had scarcely time to wonder why no one wished the girl well before the race was over. Piqued by the cheering that was given to her opponent, she caught up her fluttering robe, with an easy grace outran him, and ere he could dash forward she had laid her fingers on the goal! Her cheeks were not over-flushed, nor her eyes sparkling with triumph; quietly, and with a bearing that was less proud than at the outset of the race, she turned away from the winning-post.

And then Milanion understood why the people had wished the young man to outstrip her, for, stopping short when he saw the maiden reach the goal, the vanquished runner gazed at her with dull, dim eyes, and as she disappeared he stifled a groan of despair. He dropped on

his knees before the huge-limbed swordsman; the flowers were shaken off the sword, the naked steel flashed in the air—and the poor young fellow lay dead beneath its stroke.

The crowd broke up silently, and scattered in little groups that sought to forget the sad end of the race by busying themselves with talk of other matters. Milanion saw from the manner in which they took it, that such a sight as that afternoon's was not unusual in their city, so stepping up to an old man he begged to know why death was the penalty for losing the race, and whether the young girl was mortal or, as he judged from her beauty, a goddess upon earth.

"Stranger," cried the old man with a blaze of anger, "I pray that she who runs these wicked races may be taken from our earth! She is no goddess, forsooth, but the daughter of King Schœneus. Her upbringing was rough, and in that, methinks, lies some excuse for the hard heart she shows now.

"When she was born, her father was wroth to have a girl child, and ordered his servants to take the infant to the woods, and leave it to perish there. (Ah! no wonder the daughter of such a man is cold-hearted, and dreads to marry lest her husband be unkind as her father.) Well, Atalanta, the infant, was, happily, befriended in the forest; at first, they say, by a great shaggy bear, who, instead of hugging the life out of the little one, nursed her amongst a litter of shapeless cubs, and when one day this mother bear was killed by our woodmen, one of them picked up the child, and had her reared in his cottage. She grew to be a true daughter of the woods, skilled with her bow and arrows, while in swiftness of foot there is no man in the country—none, perchance, in the world—to equal her.

"Years passed, and the gods punished King Schœneus for his unfatherly act by sending him no other child, so that he came to pine sadly for the daughter whom he had long ago cast from him. At length Atalanta happened to come to the city, and, her strange history being noised abroad, the King heard of her, recognised his child by some sign, and with tears of joy welcomed her to his palace.

"Schœneus is now a kind-hearted, gentle king, who would fain see his daughter wed happily; but she, proud maid, has vowed to the goddess, Diana, that whoso wishes to make her his bride must first run a race with her. If the suitor wins the race, he wins also his bride, but if he fails to reach the winning-post before Atalanta, then must he forfeit his life on the spot. Many a gallant man has risked his life, and lost it, for love of the fleet-footed girl.

"Thine eyes are shining, stranger, as though thou wouldst make the trial thyself! Nay, I implore thee, dream not of wedding Atalanta. Her nimble feet would outstrip thee as easily as they sped past that young knight to-day, for all that he ran more swiftly than her former suitors. The goddess Diana herself is on the maiden's side."

Milanion could not banish from his thoughts the story of Atalanta or the remembrance of her supple beauty. He went back to the forest, but found that hunting had lost its charms; he wandered through Argive cities, and won great renown in the public games; but still he was dissatisfied, and saw in his mind another race-course, where he would have a white-footed girl to compete with, and where the prize would be infinitely dearer to him than any that he had hitherto contended for.

A month had not passed before he entered King

Schœneus' city a second time. He found the course prepared for another race, and the next evening saw one more suitor worsted by Atalanta, and slain accordingly beneath the statue of Diana. Yet Milanion thought less of the hapless man's fate than of that chance of gaining bliss untold for which life after life had been thrown away. He knew now that he was hopelessly in love with Atalanta, and that nothing could stop his longing to enter the lists. He must go in and win her—or die. Was he as swift as she? He hardly dared hope so, unsurpassed though he had proved in the Argive races. But without her, life was worthless and empty; and at last he determined that he would at least end his misery by pitting himself against her.

After a long, restless night he rose, and roamed about the town until the hour arrived at which Schœneus took his seat upon the ivory throne in the market-place to give judgment to his people and hear their requests. The anxious face of the young stranger as he pressed forward towards the King's throne told its own story. Too often had the townsfolk seen a gallant lad present himself before the King to ask the fatal favour of racing with the unconquerable maiden.

Schœneus himself guessed the answer he would receive as he inquired if it were to gain this permission that the unknown youth stood before him.

"It is, O King," replied the other, "and I trust it will be granted me to make the attempt. Fear not that I who seek the hand of Atalanta am of unworthy family. King Amphidamus is my father, and his crown is mine after him."

"Nay then, Prince," said Schœneus very earnestly, "thou shouldst not throw away thy life, which is dear to

a whole kingdom. Believe me, the goddess Diana has given my daughter a fleetness of foot that no man can equal, and if thou art beaten in the race no power upon earth can save thee from the sword. Already I fear the anger of the gods for all the deaths that lie at our door, and I beg thee, for mine own sake as well as thine, to forego this mad enterprise."

But Milanion stoutly refused to retire. He waited only to know how soon the contest might take place. Why not to-day, said he—the sooner his fate was decided the less suspense he would have to suffer. But the King would not hear of such haste. He declared that, since Milanion insisted on the race, it would be held in a month's time, and not a day sooner. For that month he invited the young man to be his guest at the palace—an invitation which Milanion, however, did not choose to accept, dreading perhaps that to see Atalanta in the interval might unnerve him for the trial. He told the King that he preferred to wander from one shrine to another, making what vows he could, to gain aid from the gods in this issue of life and death; and he must also return to Argos to see his friends again—it might be for the last time.

And so with expressions of good will on either side, mingled with sad forebodings, King Schœneus bade Milanion farewell.

On the shore of Argolis stood a temple to Venus, the sea-born goddess. Her image was placed between the pillars that marked the top of a small flight of steps, up which the blue waves crept twice a day until they kissed the white feet of the marble goddess. The temple was but a tiny place, yet nowhere in Greece could you have

found a richer store of treasures than when you passed through the lines of myrtle-trees and pushed ajar the great brass doors that guarded the landward side of Venus' shrine.

It was hither that Milanion brought mirrors fit for the very goddess of beauty to gaze in, carved bowls of the rarest handiwork, and bales of soft Indian silks. With these offerings he came to pray the goddess of the temple for her help in the contest with Diana's maiden.

"Aid me, O Queen of Love, and grant me victory over thy fair rebel," he cried, "for never has man loved Atalanta as I! Until the day when I must go to meet my death, I will not leave thy temple unless thou sendest me a token of thy favour. Oh! help me, Venus, to win the fleet-footed maiden to be thy servant and my bride."

True to his word, Milanion waited beside the altar of the Goddess of Love. Many an hour passed; the gold of sunset changed to the deep blue shades of a summer evening; the midnight hymn floated from the inner court, where a sweet-faced band of maidens clustered beneath the flickering torches; the little waves rose rippling over the steps beneath him; but the prince noted nothing—not though the rising sea tossed its light spray against his face did he move from his station beneath the image of fair Venus. And in time he got his answer.

Between the fading of night and the dawning of the new day, the South grew shining bright with the passage of a wonderful cloud that lit up sea and sky as it floated on the crests of the advancing billows. Venus was on her way to her temple! Milanion bent his head, and threw his mantle across his eyes as the dazzling vision drew near and the fragrance of the heavenly queen was wafted from the cloud of mist in which she was veiled.

A sweet voice, clear as a bell, told him that his whole-hearted cry to Venus had been heard, and that the goddess would aid him to win the maiden from Diana, who frowned upon the weaknesses of love. On the steps of the altar he would find three golden apples, dropped from the white hand of Venus herself. These he must carry with him to the race ; let him but roll one of them past Atalanta and the young girl would not fail to turn aside in pursuit of it, so lovely was the fruit and so irresistible its charm.

With a parting reminder that she who had done so much for him, would look for worship from Milanion and his bride in the happy future, the clouded figure glided from the sea-worn steps, where in the grey dawn gleamed Atalanta's lure—three marvellous heaven-sent apples of beaten gold.

At length the day has come when Milanion stands beside the white-footed maiden upon the course, sand-strewn for their race, while crowds have gathered, awaiting the wonted spectacle of a fresh suitor's defeat and death. "But does not this young prince bear himself confidently?" murmur the bystanders. "Those who aforetime entered the lists with Atalanta looked wan and anxious ; this man has a glow of joyous hope on his face and holds himself as one who means to win."

What others were remarking was not unnoticed by the girl at Milanion's side. She felt his eyes rest on her with no pleading look of farewell, but full of the gentleness that comes of assured strength. With a sudden start of surprise she wondered whether, since he meant to succeed, he might not do so ; then she went on to think how sad a fate it would be for such a gallant prince to be slain

at the end of the course. She would be sorry, would she not, when she won ?

Just then the trumpet gave the signal, and, throwing aside what scruples were gathering in her mind, she sped forward, determined to play her part, and do her best to outstrip the man who was racing for dear love of her. She darted past Milanion so swiftly that the crowds shouted his case was hopeless, when, lo ! a round golden apple was flung from his hand, and rolled past Atalanta some distance out of the track. The words that Venus had spoken were true ; the swift-footed maiden was tempted aside to pick up the enticing prize, and while she swerved from the course, Milanion gained the lead.

To regain the advantage, Atalanta pressed on more eagerly than before. The bow that she was wont to carry in her hand, as a sign that she was devoted to the huntress-maiden, Diana, was dropped when she stooped to seize the golden apple of Venus, and at the same time three arrows slipped from the quiver slung across her shoulder. Yet she prayed her patron goddess to remember her handmaid ; and Diana still counted the maiden hers, and lent her the greater swiftness of foot. Milanion's hand was on the turning-post when Atalanta sprang round the bend of the track in front of him.

Another golden ball rolled glittering across the sandy path, and lay, a tempting sight, out of the course, but not out of the maiden's sight. She hesitated, thought perchance of the ease with which she had but now gained on her rival, and then allowed herself to turn aside to secure this second treasure. Both apples she held in the folds of her robe, and with it well gathered about her, she flew on her way till once more she was abreast of Milanion. The two runners were now fast approaching the goal ;

the crowds stood motionless with excitement, for though all saw that the girl was the swifter of the two, it seemed just possible that Milanion might once again tempt her to leave the course. And this was, indeed, the case. He flung the third apple across her path, and the wonderful charm of the fruit overcame the white-footed Atalanta as she saw it gleam before her eyes. She had time, she cried to herself, to snatch it up like the others, and still to come first to the goal, and win the victory that meant, alas! death to the noblest suitor against whom she had ever contended.

She darted aside, and raised the prized apple from the dust. Then she lightly turned to speed towards the winning-post. But what means that hoarse roar of applause, that deafening shout of joy from the crowd that a moment ago was breathlessly silent? She sees as she lifts her eyes to the goal that her rival already stands there! He has won the race, and escaped death; he has gained Atalanta as his bride. A few faltering steps, and she is at the end of the course, and as Milanion's strong arms are thrown around her, she is glad at heart that he has proved himself the victor!

The Writing on the Image

THIS is a tale of sorcery, so, although you hear of its happening in the old historic town of Rome, you will hardly look for any mention of it in her city annals, where the true is sifted from the false.

In the heart of the town, says our story, there once stood an image, cut in hard cornel wood, on whose outstretched hand were carved the words *Percute hic*—Strike here! For more than two hundred years the image stood through storm and sunshine in the busy square, pointing its finger with that strange bidding to every passer-by; but while many a man paused to marvel, no one, in all those years, had guessed the secret of the letters.

At length came a man who read the simple words aright. He was a scholar, from the island of Sicily, whose life of toilsome study had furnished his mind with boundless magic lore, but had brought him little to relieve the pinch of poverty. From the moment that his eyes first rested on the image, Rome and the other famous cities he had seen on his travels held, to his thinking, no greater wonder than this uncouth little wooden figure. Day after day he turned his steps to the square, and prowled around the statue in search of a clue to its mystery, for well he knew from his studies that it was the work of a cunning magician.

"He was a crafty master who raised this monument," he murmured to himself as he stood before the image one midday. "There's black magic here, I'll be bound."

Just then the sun broke through the clouds that were flitting across the sky, and in the sudden flood of sunshine the image threw a short black shadow on the ground.

"Aha!" exclaimed the Scholar excitedly, "I have it! Now I have it!"

He glanced behind him, and, making sure that no one was near enough to notice his movements, he bent down to the place where lay the shadow of the pointing finger. With his knife he scratched a little circle to mark the exact spot upon the paving-stones. Then he returned to his lodgings, and waited as patiently as he could until night fell and the streets were deserted.

At midnight he crept quietly from the house, with lantern, pick-axe, and spade in hand, and a stout leathern sack on his shoulders. Through the slumbering town he stole back to the square, and, finding the mark which he had made in the morning, he set to work with his tools, broke through the pavement, and before long he had dug a great deep hole in the ground. At length his spade struck against something hard, that clanged harshly to his blow. Raising his lantern, the Scholar peered into the hole, and saw that he had come upon a brass ring as thick as a man's wrist, and green with rust. It was fixed to a large copper plate, on which were wonderful carvings of flowering trees, and beasts, and strange figures of evil. Plain warning was given by these unholy symbols that he who raised the plate would be intermeddling with works of the black art. But our needy Scholar scented treasures underneath, and, dazzled by the prospect of wealth, he was ready to risk body and soul alike.

"The old sorcerer," he said to himself, "has buried vast stores of riches for the first man who has wits enough to understand the writing on the image; therefore the prize hidden below this copper plate is rightly mine. I followed the bidding, and struck deep in the ground where the outstretched finger pointed at noonday, and why should I now shrink from the hazard? My eternal welfare is of less concern to me to-night than this chance of winning a princedom."

So, boldly, he put his hand in the ring, and gave it a strong pull, fancying that it would need his utmost strength to lift the heavy copper plate. To his surprise it was easily raised, and behind it was disclosed a winding staircase, down which the fresh night-wind rushed with a long-drawn moan. There was no further need of his lantern, for the stairs were lighted by many curiously wrought lamps, whose rays fell on walls that were covered with paintings of priests, warriors, kings, and fair queens.

"This fine entrance gives promise of riches greater even than I dared hope for," cried the Scholar; and with beating heart he started to run down the steps. At the foot of the staircase hung a curtain embroidered with gold letters, which, with all his learning, the Sicilian could not decipher. He swept aside the curtain, and stepped forward, only to fall back a pace or two as he caught sight of men within. It was a richly decorated hall in which he found himself; at the upper end of it ran a dais, and there (did his eyes deceive him, he wondered) sat a royal party at table! His courage failed in the presence of these figures, and he turned to flee, when, to his dismay, a gust of wind swept down the staircase, and blew out every lamp past which it swirled. More afraid to grope his way to the outer air with these strange people at his

back than to meet them face to face, the Scholar again raised the curtain, and entered the hall. His approach caused no stir upon the dais: no finger moved, not an eyelid was raised. Creeping cautiously forward, he was astonished to find that the motionless figures were the bodies of men who had long been dead, but so cleverly had each body been preserved that even yet it bore the exact semblance of life.

In the centre of the group sat a king, whose grey beard fell long and thick over his robes of gold. Beside him was the queen, in a handsomely embroidered gown of green, a golden mantle hung on her shoulders, while her necklet and girdle were studded with glittering jewels. On either side of the royal pair stood lords-in-waiting. In the background the Scholar saw a bodyguard of armed men, squires in attendance, and minstrels too. Above the king's head hung a golden lamp, and through its rich fretwork blazed an enormous carbuncle that filled the whole hall with ruddy light. Last of all, the intruder noticed that a few paces from the dais was placed the statue of an archer, bow in hand, with his arrow pointed against the carbuncle stone.

Awe and amazement held the Scholar in check for a time. He wandered amongst these marvels, content only to admire. But his purpose in coming was recalled by the thought that night-time was fast passing, and before long men would be astir in the city overhead.

"I must make haste to gather the treasures that lie here," said he. "Dead men can do me no injury though I strip them of their riches."

He drew from off his shoulders the leathern bag, patched and old, that was to bear away his plunder, and, seizing a golden goblet on which the hand of the mute king

rested, he flung his booty into the gaping mouth of the wallet. In spite of his reassuring murmurs that the dead made easy prey he almost expected the king to rise and avenge the theft; but the figure sat rigid, its eyes fixed in a passionless gaze.

Gaining heart, the Scholar untied the chain of gems from the queen's neck, and stowed it in his bag along with the two regal crowns, the jewelled shoes and girdles, and other priceless ornaments. By the time that he had satisfied his greed, the sack was packed so full that he fairly staggered beneath its weight. Just as he was turning towards the door his eyes fell on a gem of surpassing splendour. It was a great emerald set by itself in the centre of the floor.

"That green stone is worth a kingdom; I'll have it too!" he exclaimed; and down he knelt to pick it from its setting. But, try as he might, he could not dislodge it. Impatiently he flung aside his heavy sack, and strove with both hands to wrench up the stone. While his fingers were thus busy he happened to glance across the hall. What was it now that made him relax his hold upon the emerald and spring to his feet with a hoarse shriek of terror? He saw the image of the archer draw the bowstring, still pointing the arrow straight at the carbuncle that glowed in the swinging lamp. In wildest alarm the Scholar snatched up his wallet, and made ready to dash towards the curtained entrance. Too late! The arrow whizzed through the air, struck the brilliant red stone, and instantly the light of the carbuncle failed. Blackest darkness covered the hall from dais to doorway.

It was long before the Scholar, stunned by fright, recovered courage enough to rise from the spot where he

had fallen. At length he ventured to grope his way around the walls, hoping, even in the unearthly darkness, to find the opening to the staircase. He sought in vain. The wrenching of the green stone had made the arrow speed from the hand of the bowman and strike out the light of the glowing carbuncle, and by a like cunning contrivance the passage to the outer world was closed for ever when the covetous hand of the intruder had grasped the enticing emerald. Imprisoned in the dungeon of riches, the Scholar met slow death by starvation; the treasures that elsewhere would have bought countless comforts were of no avail to him who had thus wittingly risked his life in the magic hall.

On the night of his unhappy venture, just before daybreak, a terrible thunderstorm swept across Rome. A stroke of lightning destroyed the cornel-wood image whose finger had pointed the Scholar to his doom. The same thunderbolt flung back the copper plate over the mouth of the passage, and the heavy rain that followed the thunder, washed into the hole the soil which the adventurer had flung aside in his digging. Next morning men stood and gazed at the charred wooden image, but none wondered at the broken pavement, which seemed to be likewise only the result of the storm. As to the Scholar's disappearance, he was too poor and friendless a stranger to be missed.

The Fostering of Aslaug

WHEN Brynhild mounted the funeral pyre of her dearly-loved Sigurd and followed him to the halls of death, she left their child, the little three-year-old Aslaug, in the care of her foster-father, old Heimir.

It seemed at first that the sad news of Brynhild's end had stunned the old man, so silently he sat brooding alone; but when men saw him rise the next morning and seek his smithy, they said that he had recovered himself, and had gone to forget his grief in some wondrous piece of workmanship such as he often forged.

For ten days he worked behind closed doors, and then, somewhat to the surprise of his people, he came for Aslaug, the little golden-haired girl, and drew her away with him. They wondered the more when night fell and neither their old master nor the child returned to the house. At early morning they rose, to find the smithy door wide open, the forge cold, and Heimir's tools thrown aside carelessly, as if his cunning hands had no more use for them. The workshop was empty, and man and child were nowhere to be found. Then followed a long, fruitless search, until a chance whisper gained credit, and Heimir's sorrowing people came to believe that Odin had called him to his last home. And if the old hero had joined the deathless

band, said they, what wonder was there that he took with him Brynhild's little child to gladden the mother's heart as she dwelt with Freia ?

So Heimir passed from his home, and his people looked for him no more.

Yet was he still on earth. A night and a day he strode through the loneliest parts of his wild country—a splendid figure wrapped in a peasant's coarse grey cloak, his thin, bronzed face, eagle-like in nose and eyes, half hidden by the rim of a slouched hat. By his side hung his sheathed sword, and on his shoulder he carried a harp fashioned with strangely thick framework. Who could have guessed what was to be disclosed when, after a long day's walk, he knelt down in the depths of a quiet wood, laid the harp on the ground, and, with a touch upon some secret spring, threw open the broad bend of the framework ? Within the hollow lay little Aslaug fast asleep, like a rosebud, closely bound in soft, dainty wrappings. She woke beneath Heimir's hand as he unlocked her prison and set her free to wander on the grass. Merrily she danced amongst the flowers while the old man sat playing now sweet and glad, and now sad and solemn, music on the harp that had been his last work ere he left home. When the cool evening breeze began to stir the leaves overhead, Aslaug at last showed signs of weariness. She nestled down in his arms, and together they sat contentedly—she, prattling of her happy games, he, musing on their secret journey and its cause.

"A small thing it is for Brynhild's sake and her child's, to leave my home in this manner," ran his thoughts. "There, without doubt, her parents' foes would have sought my dear little Aslaug and tried to kill her ; but now, if only we can reach Atli's land in secret, the child will be safe in his keeping, and when my few last years

" She nestled down in his arms "

are ended, she will still have in him a protector against the schemes of the Nibelungs and that hateful Grimhild. Oh! if this journey were but safely done, I care not how soon I am called from the world!"

From beneath his cloak he pulled out a small flask, containing a sleeping potion which he had himself prepared, carefully let a few drops fall between Aslaug's lips, and as her eyes closed, lifted her gently into the hollow of the harp. A few minutes later he was again a lonely minstrel on his way through the forest.

In the darkness of evening he walked as far as he could, unable to see where he was going, until he came to the edge of the wood, and from the hillside heard the sea-waves breaking on the rocks below. Looking round for shelter, he saw a light in a cottage window, and turned his steps accordingly towards the place. His knock at the low, tumble-down door was answered by a peevish voice bidding him come in.

Within the hovel sat an elderly woman, lean and sour-faced. When she saw the tall, grey-haired figure before her, she rose, showing herself to be of even greater height than Heimir, and fixed her ugly, light blue eyes upon him with a suspicious stare.

Her first words were to ask him sneeringly whether he had come in her husband's absence to steal his goods, and when Heimir replied that all that he sought was a night's shelter, she made him an ungracious answer.

"Well, put down that clumsy, ill-made harp of yours, that matches your dress, and no doubt your playing. You are no lordly visitor, I see."

But though she glanced mockingly at the stranger, her sharp eyes had already seen a gleam of gold beneath his coarse cloak, and she knew from his bearing that he was

not a humble wayfarer. To make certain that she was right in her suspicions, she moved up behind him, and looked again at the harp. A fringe of some fine gold cloth was hanging over a corner of its frame. That proved the man was an impostor, she muttered to herself; and finally, brushing against his cloak as she busied herself preparing a potful of porridge, she saw a great gold circlet clasped on his arm. Had Heimir noticed her greedy stare at that moment, he would have picked up his precious burden, and braved the dangers of a night amongst the wolves in the forest rather than sleep beneath her roof. But his eyes were elsewhere, like his thoughts, and after he had taken supper, he was ready to lie down where she chose.

Telling him that her husband would soon be in, and that his ill-temper would make the cottage unbearable to a stranger, she led Heimir to the barn, and told him he might sleep in the straw. With a scowl on her wicked face, she marked that he had picked up his harp and carried it from the cottage out of her reach.

That evening her husband found her pacing restlessly about the room, impatient—unusually so—for his return. For once wealth was within their reach, she cried; all that he had to do was to kill an old grey-haired simpleton who lay sound asleep in their barn, and the goods that he had with him would all be theirs.

The man was afraid to go out and do the deed, but he was more afraid to stay where he was and refuse, so, urged on by his wife, he crept at grey dawn into the barn with a stout spear in his grasp. Down in the straw he saw Heimir asleep, his sword laid across his knees, and his right hand resting amongst the harp strings, that even in his sleep he was plucking now and again. The faint

sound of the strings made the wretch who was stealing over the barley straw, stop in sudden terror, thinking there was something ghostly in the air. Then, seeing from where the breath of music had arisen, he drew himself together, clenched his teeth, and plunged the spear deep into Heimir's heart. The old hero never awakened. His life was ended there, before he could take Aslaug the long journey to Atli's land; but perhaps from their place amidst the gods, Brynhild and he still watched over the little one, who was now left in cruel hands, far from the help which the good foster-father had forsaken his home to procure for her.

Morning came, and the wicked Grima and her husband stripped the dead man of what lay beneath his cloak, but when they turned to pick from off the harp the fringed cloth, whose end had fluttered from it, they found, to their surprise, that it was fastened in a hinge, and that there seemed to be a secret box in the hollow of the instrument.

In hope of finding hidden treasures, they took edged tools, and broke open the hollow, wherein, to their unbounded astonishment, they saw what Heimir had concealed—little Aslaug, gazing up at them with fearless eyes.

Their disappointment would have been greater had not the child been dressed in the daintiest of silks, and wrapped in a richly embroidered shawl. These took Grima's fancy, and she roughly pulled them off the little girl, who, quite unused to such handling, and too dazed to speak, stood silent before the old hag.

It was hard that they should have a hungry child's mouth to fill, grumbled the woman, but she would make sure that, in time to come, the girl made herself

useful in the house and proved a drudge worth her keep.

Question after question she put to Aslaug, and yet no word crossed the firmly-closed little lips. The child was puzzled at the new voice and hurt by Grima's rough ways, so that neither coaxing nor threats would make her utter a sound. At last the couple concluded she was dumb. They took her to the cottage, where the woman dressed her in the rags of some of her own old worn clothes, and grudgingly gave her each day her little portion of food. From the very first, Aslaug was expected, a mere infant though she was, to fetch and carry for the elder folk whatever she had strength to lift.

She was a brave little thing, stout-hearted, and merry by nature, and before she was many years older she had learnt to take her part wisely in that miserable cottage, doing her work well, and setting her teeth to keep back her sobs when Grima's blows fell heavily upon her shoulders. Having made up their mind that the child had been born dumb, neither husband nor wife spent further time in trying to get her to talk, and she, being too shy and unhappy to do so at first, was still less willing to speak to them later. Never did they hear her voice, and never did they guess that she had the power to use it.

Grima had chosen a name for her when they could not find out her own. "I don't mind giving my mother's name to the little fright," she said, with a laugh, "so we will call her the Crow."

It was indeed a hard childhood that Aslaug spent with these people, but, thanks to her independent spirit and the light-heartedness with which she enjoyed what hours she could snatch by herself, fourteen years of that life did not make her look either careworn or gloomy. At seventeen,

she was a tall, slim girl, marvellously fair, with a cloud of deep golden hair around her face; and yet her charm did not lie in her beauty so much as in the wonderful brightness of her smile and her soft, shining grey eyes. How she came to be so lovely was the more strange because old Grima had done all she could to thwart her sweet temper. Aslaug in the cottage beside the crabbed pair was a silent girl, quick to do her work and escape out of doors to become the glad, singing Aslaug of the woods and hillside.

One spring day she was tripping after her herd of goats, which she had deserted for the pleasure of a bathe in the poplar-screened lake, and as her little white feet danced amongst the early violets and anemones, she laughed to think how Grima would scowl at her fairness if she ever chanced to look at her less casually.

"How she and her husband love ugliness!" she sighed. "When I see them sitting in their dirty dress, chuckling over their cleverness in killing the old, kind-faced man who brought me here fourteen years ago, I sometimes wonder if the whole world is not as ugly and cruel as they. Yet when I get away from them, and watch that stainless sky, and feel the good, fresh wind upon me, I know that all is well. You wouldn't be growing here, little flowers, would you, if the world were really a loveless place and there was no one to care for you? We are meant to be happy, and I will be."

At the edge of the woodland she stopped short in surprise, for down below, in the calm bay, lay anchored a great foreign ship, with dark, flapping sails, and a golden dragon carved on the prow. It was a sight that she had never seen near the shore, though often she had stood and watched such vessels sweeping at full sail far out on the

open. Drawn up on the beach was a small boat manned by a few sailors, who had been sent ashore, as Aslaug rightly guessed, to bring back some fresh provisions to the ship.

Now, Grima's was the only dwelling to be found above the bay, so perhaps, thought the girl, the strangers would be there when she brought home her herd of goats. It would be amusing to see new faces and listen to their talk. Aslaug did not loiter on the way; her cheeks were rosy with her race downhill when she reached the door of the hovel and heard the peevish voice of old Grima raised to excuse herself: "You need not look to me to help you—I have not the strength to work as I would like—but wait till my daughter, the Crow, comes home, and we'll make her give you what aid you need."

The girl pushed open the door, and stood silent on the threshold, barefoot and bare-headed, save that a wreath of wild flowers decked her golden hair, a ragged old gown, that had once been Grima's, making her beauty the greater by contrast with its shabbiness. The sailors stopped talking, and gazed open-mouthed at "the Crow."

One of them turned sharply towards the old woman.

"We don't need two eyes to see that this is not your own child," he said.

Grima was furious. "She's not like me, is she not? I can tell you I was better looking than that hussy when I was her age. Aye; and her mother has a tongue like other honest folk, whereas the Crow is dumb as a worm. Well, I don't complain of that, for she works the better, I daresay, because she is tongue-tied, and she hears all that is said to her. Now start your baking, and she'll bring you more wood if you need it."

In time the loaves were baked, though how the men

did their work they could not have told, for their sole thought was of the dainty maid who worked amidst them ; and much the others envied him who stood beside her and had the joy of taking the flour from her sweet hands. When no further excuse could be found for lingering in the cottage, they bade good-night to mother and daughter, as Grima insisted they should be called, and, mazed and thoughtful, returned with their sacks of bread to the great ship. They need not have troubled to carry the loaves so far ; the first bite proved that the bread was fit only to be thrown overboard ! Such an outcry the rest of the crew raised against the unfortunate bakers that news of their sorry performance came to the ears of their master himself. He questioned them chaffingly about the baking.

" Ah ! prince," they stammered, " there is not a man alive who could have done any better in that cottage. It was not the blear-eyed, yellow-faced old woman who put us off our work—oh no ! It was the young girl who came in, sweet, glad-eyed, and fresh as the spring flowers in her chaplet ; and when she moved amongst us—fairer than Freia we vow—our wits were scattered, and we were struck as foolish as the Greak Auk ! "

" Nonsense ! " answered their lord. " You are making too much of the girl's looks. Was hers, in truth, the fairest face you had ever seen ? Was she—well, was she as beautiful as the Lady Thora, my lovely wife, now dead ? "

One and all, the men replied that, to their mind, the girl was more charming even than Thora, exquisite though her beauty had been.

" If the gods have indeed made two such women, they have done passing well," remarked the prince. " I must see the peasant girl myself and listen to her voice."

"But, my lord, the old crone told us her daughter was born dumb," said one of the men. "The maid speaks not a word."

"Well, I can at least see her," returned their lord; "but as my vow at Yule-tide, not to set foot on land until I entered the lists at Micklegarth, holds me here, you shall go back to the cottage, and ask her to come aboard for a little time. Tell her that she will be treated with all honour, as though our ship were her father's home."

The message was taken to Aslaug next morning, and as she could not then answer the seamen in words, she gave her assent by signs. Grima listened to the invitation in sullen anger, but she feared to offend the men who had brought her good pay for the meal and flour that they had taken from her, and since the girl's visit to the ship was to be a short one, it seemed too small a matter to object to. She, therefore, wisely held her peace, although the scowls upon her face were eloquent of her feelings.

What a happy day Aslaug spent in looking forward to her visit to the ship! She had been amused watching the rough sailors in Grima's cottage, where hardly ever a stranger crossed the threshold, and she had been content to look at the beautiful golden-prowed vessel lying out in the bay, but what an unexpected joy to be asked to come on board, and meet the lord of these men and master of the great ship! As, towards evening, she set out for the shore, she was dreaming joyously of the treat that it would be to stand on deck, with the green sea lapping all around her, to see the well-ordered floating palace that the seamen had described to Grima, and, above all, to be beside the great lord Ragnar, whom they praised so heartily. At the thought of meeting him, however, she

paused in distress. What would he, a king's son, think of her ragged old frock, through which one of her white arms was actually peeping at the shoulder? She kept herself so fresh and pretty that her bare feet and head made her look but the sweeter, yet do what she might, her frock was hopelessly dingy, and she flushed rosy red with vexation when the breeze shook out its tattered folds. Then she laughed happily at a new thought. She untwisted her hair from its long plait, and down it fell in great waves to the very edge of her skirts, covering her ugly dress like a mantle of gold.

So it was that the seamen saw the girlish figure run down to the beach, wrapped in a cloud that was ruddy gold against the rays of the setting sun. Ragnar, their lord, was impatiently awaiting her coming, yet when his men had rowed her out in their light boat from the shore, his welcoming words were few, and, as he felt, all too poor for the ears of a guest so wondrously fair. For to see her was to worship her beauty. All through the ship he led her courteously; and she, overjoyed at all that had come to her that day, thought not of speaking until she was alone with him beneath the golden canopy at the stern; then, to his great joy and surprise, she opened her lips, and breathed to him the first words she had spoken to any man since Heimir left her: "Oh, if I but knew that you, my lord, were as happy as I!" And in a little while she knew that he was even so, for love took sole possession of his heart, and, bending down, he told her that this was the sweetest hour that he had ever spent. The sun had not gone down that night before the Danish prince had prayed the maid to be his wife and sail away with him in his great ship; but Aslaug shook her head.

"No, no," said she; "it is not that I care little for you,

but you are born to be a king, and I have been brought up as a foundling by poor peasant-folk who could teach me little. You love me to-day; but what if you found I were no fit helpmate, and tired of me after I had become your wife? You say I would aid you to live a noble life like your father's? Then listen: Go, do the deeds that your men have said you are on the road to essay. If you can do them the better for love of me, I shall be proud indeed, and if you come back from Micklegarth still minded to make me your bride, you will find me here thinking of you every day, Ragnar, and praying for your happiness."

To these words the prince answered firmly: "My heart is yours from to-day to the end of my life. I will go on to Micklegarth, as I vowed at Yule-tide, and see if I can win fame. And if I fall by the sword, and you in after years become the dear wife of another—it may well be a great king—you must sometimes say to yourself: 'Ragnar the Dane loved me to his death; his heart was mine even to the end.'"

But Aslaug's bright eyes were fast filling with tears at this gloomy talk. She broke in hastily: "You must not say things like that when we are sad enough as it is, saying farewell. Whatever happens I shall go on loving you, and be glad when I think of the happy time I have spent with you this day. And oh, how sweet it will be to see you if you sail into our bay once again!

"I want you to remember," she went on very seriously, "that I am only a poor goatherd girl who lives in cowardly fear of the cross old woman for whom she works. You must not dream that I am anything better, and if your high station requires you to marry a lady of noble birth, then you must give up thinking of me."

"Yes," said Ragnar, with a smile; "of course, my second wife must be as noble as was Thora, the wife whom I have lost; and you, of all women, have alone seeemed to me her equal. Look, Aslaug," and he stooped over a chest, and lifted out an exquisite garment, "this is the manner of dress that should be yours, my queen; I pray you to take it now and wear it in token of my love." These last words he said somewhat haltingly, from fear that she might be hurt at his noticing the meanness of her attire.

Aslaug, however, put him at his ease when she laughingly refused. "Why, it is too fine for any but a goddess to wear! As for my taking it, that would never do. If I should see you no more, the gift would remind me of you too sadly; and even if, as I trust, some happy day will bring you back to me, I could not meanwhile wear this rich clothing in a smoky cottage or out on the hill herding my goats, could I? The first person to wear it would be Grima, the old peasant woman who keeps me. Nay, look not so angry," she cried as she saw him flush hotly at Grima's name, and lay his hand on his sword, as though he would strike down the person who dared touch Aslaug. "We must not vex ourselves over her ill-temper. Why, my daily troubles will seem easy to bear now that I can dream of your returning to me."

Though loth to part from her, Ragnar had at last to watch Aslaug leave his ship and cross the sands to the cottage over the hillside. A long, long time he stood wrapt in thought of her after her slight figure had been lost to his yearning eyes in the soft spring twilight.

Then the tide came flowing in, and, rousing himself from his reveries, the Danish prince gave orders to put out to sea; the banks of oars bent to their work, and next morning, when Aslaug scanned the water, the ship was far out

of sight, bearing fast towards the land where Ragnar was to win great glory.

The love of Ragnar sweetened Aslaug's life for the months to come. She had found a new joy in the world, and though she sometimes trembled to think that her lover might never return, she tried hard to dwell only on her happier thoughts—the memory of that afternoon spent in the ship and the hope of seeing him sail back for her some glad day.

And that day dawned at last.

One bright May morning, twelve months after Ragnar's visit to the bay, she was busy making ready the early meal in the cottage, old Grima, sour and peevish as ever, muttering discontentedly beside her, when the door opened and Grima's husband came hurrying in.

"There they are back again!" he exclaimed. "They have come to work us ill, I'll be bound. I have often thought to myself that it was folly to let our dumb witch, the Crow, make friends with them, Grima. The girl will yet cause us to pay for the slaughter of the minstrel fifteen years ago. Do you think these seamen can have scented that murder?"

"Oh, hold your tongue!" cried his wife angrily. "Do you mean that the strangers who baked their bread in this house last year are on their way to us again? That's nothing to be afraid of, old white-liver; I only hope they pay us as handsomely this time as last. Why should you begin chattering of such ill things as misfortune, and the Crow, and the fool whom we dispatched once upon a time? The sailors have nothing to do with our little concerns."

Her talk was interrupted by a voice from the threshold: 'Where is the lovely maiden whom we have come over

seas to find and who once lived here? Dwells she still in this cottage?"

Aslaug with a beating heart had listened to the goodman's news of strangers on the road. She had been bending over the fire as she stirred a handful of meal into the pot, and even at the seaman's hearty shout she did not turn round nor raise her head.

Grima's downtrodden husband saw a chance of putting himself forward, and made answer in whining tones.

"The girl is still living on my bounty; poor as I am, I have fed, clothed, and sheltered her these fifteen years. Heaven knows what rich rewards we deserve for all the kindness we have shown the dumb creature!"

The men did not trouble to point out that Grima had told them the girl was her own child and that the goodman had now given away the secret.

"Waste not our time with your lying words," answered a sailor shortly. "If the chosen wife of our prince wishes you to swing upon the gallows for your treatment of her, we will be happy to do her bidding. Ah, there she is! All hail to you, lady!"

Aslaug was carrying the bowl of porridge from the fire to the rough table, when the sailor, catching sight of her, ran forward to do the humble task in her place. But she, smiling her thanks to him, passed on, and herself set the dish on the table; then, turning to the group, she opened her lips, and, to the amazement and utter confusion of the peasant couple, spoke in the prettiest of voices, clear and sweet:

"Methinks you must have come with tidings from the good lord Ragnar who saw me on his ship last springtide."

"That is so, my lady," returned the chief of the party.

"Our prince has fulfilled his vow, and done great deeds of valour in Micklegarth. Now he is back in your bay, eager to claim the bride of whom he has told all his men, and yet, at times, torturing himself with fears lest you may have ceased to care for him, have found a king perchance to marry, or may even lie cold and dead in the grave. So much did he fear bad news at this cottage that he would not come himself to seek you. He charged us, if we found you, to beg you to join him on his ship this very morning. Each hour he finds hard to bear while he is longing so impatiently to see you at his side."

"I shall go straightway," she answered, "for I am fain to be with him whom I love with my whole heart. But as I leave this cottage never to return, I would give this needy couple something to make their lives the easier. Have you aught of my lord's with you? Methinks he would gladly give me what I wish."

"My lady, we have dainty gifts sent you from our prince, if so be that you would deck yourself to come aboard, and all the gold and gems we carry with us are at your disposal alone."

"Then I shall make use of my kind lord's presents," said Aslaug. "Not that I will wear these fair robes to-day, for I would rather the prince saw me once more as the humble peasant girl that I am, and whom he loved last spring-tide in spite of her poverty and rags. But his other gifts I would take from your hands and leave them to those who have, at least, sheltered me these fifteen years.

"See, Grima, the jewels shall be yours, and this gold is for your husband. If words could bring you happiness, I would wish that good might still befall you, but methinks wishes are vain when your evil moods must

surely bring you greater misery year by year. At any-rate, think not that I harbour angry thoughts against you. Fare ye well."

Could anything more unlooked for have happened in that wretched cottage? "The Crow," whom man and wife had treated with such contempt, was called to be the wife of a great prince, and she who had been dumb before them all those years, had bidden them farewell in gentle tones and left them a store of gold and jewels!

There was great rejoicing in the hovel over the prize left by the kind-hearted maiden, but how different from that greedy joy was Aslaug's gladness when she joined Ragnar in his splendid gold-prowed ship!

And that his bride was the high-born daughter of Brynhild and great Sigurd became known to the Danish prince, when next morning Aslaug told him of this vision that had come to her as she slept:

"The stars were glittering brightly above our snow-laden earth as I rose high on the night wind to a realm of fire, and through the flame, passed to a fair palace built all of gold. At my approach, the palace hall rang with the blare of trumpets, and the noble king upon the throne turned to his queen to ask the reason of the outburst.

"'Tis the noise of Ragnar's fame,' she answered him.

"'And that maiden figure that now glides through our halls?'

"'Tis Aslaug, our child, whom I left on earth when I came to join thee, my Sigurd—she who is now the bride of great Ragnar.'

"And methought that the noble pair smiled on me kindly as I left their fire-girt palace in the heavens."

"I, too, had a strange dream," said Ragnar in his turn.

"At grey dawn I was wandering upon a waste strewn

with the armour of dead men and the bleached bones of those who had once fought there. A great light shone afar, and I, drawing near to it, sought ever to win my way through a rampart of flames, but could not. Then where I, in my frailty, could not walk, two figures passed through the fiercest of the fire unscathed. Great Sigurd and Brynhild came from out that brightness, and, hailing me, set in my hand a fair, white lily. This flower I cherished, placing it in the soil, and tending it carefully, and lo! the grey, sunless dawn turned to glorious day, the waste place became a garden of sweetest blossoms—and all because you, my love, the white lily from Brynhild's bosom, had been sent to change my life of cheerless warfare into days of love, happiness, and peace."

Bellerophon at Argos

PRŒTUS, King of Argos, was resting with his huntsmen after a morning's chase in the forest, when a travel-stained rider broke into the glade where the royal party were seated at their midday meal. The man had evidently ridden a long distance, and that, too, in great haste, for his handsome dress was torn and dishevelled, the broken sheath at his side had lost its sword, and as for his black war-horse, it was quivering with the strain of those weary miles, its flanks were wet with sweat, its breast flecked with foam. Despair was written in the young horseman's haggard features, which were yet of so noble a cast that the Argive king saw at a glance that this was no common fugitive, but a youth of gentle birth fleeing from some overwhelming trouble.

The huntsman, silencing the dogs, who were growling suspiciously at the new-comer, called upon him to halt, and give a reason for his flight through the royal forest. The knight at once dismounted, and made answer that, if he had still life enough within him to tell his tale, he was willing to do so in their master's hearing. Accordingly he was led before Prœtus, who seeing his sad plight and utter exhaustion, exclaimed: "Rest and take meat with us, stranger. You are over-weary to begin your tale at this moment, and when we hear it later, methinks

we shall not be vexed that we have ventured to show you hospitality. I am not one to suspect a man only because he looks woe-begone." Then the kind-hearted Argive forced him to sit down and eat, watching with pleasure whilst he satisfied his two days' hunger, and wondering what would prove to be the history of his prepossessing guest.

"I have fled for my life," said the stranger, at last breaking silence, "and yet I should not be sorry if some one took it from me now. Listen to this.

"Till yesterday I lived a happy life at Corinth, where my father is king. I had a brother, Beller, who was very dear to me. We played together when we were boys, and as we grew older we planned how we would go out together and seek to do great deeds in the world. Alas! Beller's name will be unknown to fame, and mine will only be remembered for the hideous deed my hands wrought yesterday.

"For three nights I was visited by a very terrible dream. It seemed to me that a tall grey figure roused me from sleep, and led me across the room to the bed where my brother lay sleeping. There this figure of Fate thrust into my hand a dart, on whose shaft were bands of silver, and whose tuft of feathers was green and scarlet. I struggled to stay my hand, but could not; then I madly drove the dart into Beller's side!

"While I slept, the horror of that dream was forgotten in another strange vision. Methought I wandered on a hillside, looking down upon a great white-walled city built hard by the sea-shore. On the sands a multitude was holding funeral games in honour of their dead king, whose name indeed I heard for the first time, but whose face was no other than my own!

"Not once, but for three nights, these dreams came to me, until I could bear the burden of them no longer. To tell them to my brother was impossible, for it would look to him as though the visions were the outcome of schemes that I was harbouring in my heart against him, and I could not have him doubt my love. But I thought of another man to whom I could safely confide the trouble. He was an old priest, who lived some distance out of Corinth, and who had been a dear friend from the time when he taught us in our childhood. I rose from my third night of these dreams, and made ready to ride to his abode at daybreak. As I passed through the porch of the palace I saw lying beside a pillar the very dart which I had held in my dream! To show to the priest how real my terrors had been, I picked up the hateful thing, and carried it in my belt.

"The ride was in vain, for when I reached the temple courts I found that the priest had walked overnight into our city. He had been in great sorrow about some matter, his people declared, though what weighed so heavily upon him they could not say. For my part, I was the more troubled at hearing this, since it seemed to me that he must have gone to the palace to warn us of the very danger which overshadowed my dreams.

"I rode back with heavy heart, but had only gone about half way through the woods, when I was roused from my musings by the sound of voices at some distance. I reined up my horse, and listened. The far-away sound changed to one close at hand. The thicket in front of me rustled beneath some footfall, and as I thought of the many kinds of wild beasts that haunt our woods, the bushes parted, and a great grey form stalked forward. I had but a moment to aim at what seemed to me a monster

wolf. Rising in the stirrups I flung the silver-clasped dart straight at its breast. The dart struck deep, but, ah! as I looked again, I saw that it was not a wolf that I had killed; it was Beller, my brother!

"The voices sounded close by my ear before I had recovered myself. From out the thicket ran the priest of whom I had gone in search, and with him a body of armed men. They saw my brother dead at my feet, and straightway they made ready to seize me, his murderer, but I made my escape from their swords, I scarcely know why—perchance because at the time I could not guess that life would become so hard to bear. To-day I would willingly bend my head before the swordsmen from whom yesterday I fled. One of them I met face to face, and fought until he was thrown from his horse and my blade shivered; the others, methinks, were not loth to see me ride away uninjured, for the death of one prince that morning was great enough calamity for the kingdom."

Prœtus was extremely sorry for his guest when he heard of his misfortune. He did what he could to cheer him however, promising that the priests of Argos should at once purify him from the blood that he had unintentionally shed. Then he reminded him that, since his first dream had, unhappily, been fulfilled, the second might also come to pass, and he might become king of a fair, new country. Meanwhile he begged him to make the palace of Argos his home.

The fact was that Prœtus was much taken with his guest, and was determined to make a friend of him. Although the poor young prince of Corinth was grieving too deeply to attend to what went on around him, King Prœtus persisted in talking to him, and

pointed out everything of interest on their ride to the palace.

It was too late that evening to do more than attend the banquet held in honour of the day's hunt, but next morning the King took his guest to the chief temple in the city, and there the priests slew great white bulls and heaped incense upon the altar fire; while the stranger, barefoot, and olive branch in hand, prayed fervently for forgiveness from heaven. At length the priests declared the rites fulfilled, and the suppliant free from the guilt of having shed his brother's blood.

"Depart from our temple, Prince, blameless, and reconciled to the gods above, but let your name be changed, to mark your confession of the unhappy deed you wrought. You shall henceforth be known as the slayer of Beller—*Bellerophon.*"

The priests' pardon comforted the prince not a little, but his face remained grave and sad, in spite of the entertainment which Prœtus now thrust upon him.

Together they made a round of the royal stables, the armouries, the treasure-house, and the palace halls with their rare tapestries and carvings of many well-known stories. Throughout their walk, however, Bellerophon showed so little interest that his host almost despaired of rousing him to share in the everyday pursuits that contented the nobles of Argos. When they seemed to have exhausted the wonders of the palace Prœtus stopped at a gate heavily plated with silver, and turning with a laugh towards his silent companion, he said: "I have done what I could to cure your sad mood, Bellerophon, but since I possess not the art to treat it rightly, I must take you to another, who may handle your trouble more delicately!"

He opened the door, and the sound of sweet girlish voices told that they were coming to the women's quarters of the palace. They crossed another threshold and entered the Queen's hall. It was a beautiful place, marble-floored, and cool with the spray that arose from a fountain playing in the centre of the hall. The windows looked across a sunny bay, where fishing boats and a few black-prowed foreign ships lay at anchor, and through the open lattices a butterfly would now and again flit in, to dance around the great bowlfuls of rose-laurels that the slave girls had set beside the Queen's throne. The maidens were busy at their spindles, an old dame was standing by the loom, and a young girl hastened across the hall to lay aside the web that had just been finished. The mistress of all these busy womenfolk was sitting idle upon her throne. Bellerophon noted at a glance how surpassingly handsome she was, but as her eyes fell upon one of her maids, who had done some small thing amiss, he saw upon her face an ugly look of passion that could come only from a cruel and exacting temper.

The King introduced his guest, and talked cheerfully of the friendship which he wished that they three might cherish ; and while she listened with some scorn to her husband's well-meant speeches, Queen Sthenobœa looked again and again at the quiet prince, who paid her so little courtly homage, and who, for that reason, aroused her interest the more.

Whatever it may have been that attracted her, Bellerophon had not left the hall before she had fallen deeply in love with him. He, on the other hand, could not admire her as he did the good-hearted King; but as time wore on he was touched by her anxiety to make his life at Argos a happy one, and he endeavoured

to respond to the efforts of the royal pair to interest him.

The hapless fugitive had now found a new life. To please the King of Argos he undertook one mission after another; all that he took in hand he carried through successfully, while in the performance of his duties he won many a friend by his kindliness and courtesy. Prœtus relied upon him, alike in peace and in war, and would often employ him on difficult matters of state in outlying parts of the kingdom, where, truth to tell, Bellerophon was happier than at court, because at the palace the Queen ever beset him with endless attentions which he was glad to escape. The more plainly did he show that he could not care for her as she wished, the more persistently did she try to win his love by foolish little artifices that could only lower her in his esteem. At length a day came when, the Prince of Corinth being alone with her, she lost control of her temper, and stormed at him because he was cold, and indifferent to her advances. When he left her presence that afternoon, he was thankful to remember that on the morrow he had to quit Argos upon a warlike mission that would keep him in the field for many months, and that while the war lasted, he would be free from further annoyance from Sthenobœa.

It was not long, however, before his good generalship gained the victory, and he had nothing to do but lead back his troops to the city. A triumphal procession was held upon his return to the city of Argos, for the townsfolk, having heard of his victories, flocked out in a great body to welcome their dearly loved Bellerophon when he set foot once more upon the quay. The King too was at the harbour, and in his joy he flung his arms about the hero's neck, who, he cried, was dear as a son

to him. As they drew near the palace, Bellerophon, with some hesitation, asked how the Queen fared. Prœtus gave him an honest reply. "Why, she fares well, and has few troubles to bear, since she never thinks of sharing other people's. I hope that your life and mine may long be as unclouded as hers."

Alas for the King's hopes! Bellerophon had returned to Argos not to enjoy peace and good fortune, but to suffer most unjustly from the fierce anger which the Queen nursed against him. Once more she tried to win his love, but when he showed that he would only treat her courteously, as the wife of his friend and the queen of the country, then her disappointment was so bitter that she resolved to wreak a cruel vengeance upon him.

She came one evening to the King with a grievous charge against Bellerophon, saying that he was no true friend, but a wicked villain, who that day had tried to win her from her husband's side, and who had shown himself capable of base and treacherous conduct. Now, there was not one word of truth in all that the Queen said, but to Prœtus, who had no idea that his wife bore a grudge against the prince, her excitement and horror as she told her tale appeared to be certain proof of Bellerophon's guilt.

The poor King was in despair when Sthenobœa left him to think over the charge which she had brought against his dearest friend. Had Prœtus been quick-witted, or had he been a suspicious man, he might have chosen to look into the matter more closely before taking any steps, and though for years past he had known that his wife was untruthful, yet it did not even now occur to him that she could be capable of making a false accusation.

" Once more she tried to win his love "

He groaned as he thought how he must punish Bellerophon, and still more as he pictured the loneliness of his own life without him whom he had loved so devotedly. Two things were certain—that he could not bear to look again upon Bellerophon, and that he could not give the order to have him slain in the land of Argos, whither he had come as an outcast, and where by his valour he had won the rank and honour of a prince. But where should he be sent to suffer his due punishment? Surely to Lycia, the land in which Queen Sthenobœa had been born and bred, and over which her father, Jobates, still held rule. It was meet, said Prœtus to himself, that in that country Bellerophon should be put to death for the crime of which Sthenobœa had declared him guilty. He remembered that at the quay lay a ship ready to set sail for Lycia as soon as its Phrygian master received his last orders from the palace. Had not he, Prœtus, visited the boat that very day, and had not he told the Phrygian that, with his final instructions, he would send the payment due to the sailors, and a gold ring in token that the bearer came by the King's orders? That, then, was the ship in which to despatch Bellerophon upon his fatal journey. By the light of two flickering tapers the King wrote these hasty words upon a scroll:

"To Prince Bellerophon, whom I have often called my son.

"Needs must you embark for Lycia at daybreak. This my ring and the two bags of gold I pray you bear to the Phrygian who awaits my leave to set sail from our harbour. In his ship, you will be borne to Lycia, where you must seek Jobates the king, and give him this casket. Remind him that he and I alone possess keys to open it. Within, he will find a letter of much importance.

"And now, Bellerophon, farewell. Come not to see me ere you set sail. It may be that we shall never meet again; it may be that your days will be short upon earth; but whatever befall, I know that you will not rail foolishly at Fate, nor think with bitterness upon one who in the past loved and cared for you as I have done. Farewell."

Another letter he wrote, which he locked within the casket that he had spoken of, and then, having summoned his chamberlain, he gave him the letter to Bellerophon, the casket, the royal ring, and two bags of gold, telling him that all these he must deliver into the prince's hand without an instant's delay. And so the chamberlain hastened to the bedchamber of Bellerophon, and, finding him awake, begged him to read the king's message. Three times the prince read the note before he fully realised that Prœtus had addressed him in strange and unfriendly terms. As he had no suspicion of the false charge which the Queen had made against him, he was quite at a loss to understand this sudden change of feeling on the King's part, and at first his resentment was so strong that he was inclined to go and reproach Prœtus for his fickleness. It was not long, however, before his anger died down, and he reasoned with himself that possibly the King had been moved to send him this curt message in order that, by an unexpected departure, he might escape some hidden danger at Argos. If, on the other hand, the letter were a deliberate expression of displeasure, he could but trust that some day he might have an opportunity to prove himself innocent of any grave offence. In the meantime he hastened to fulfil the orders given him.

He rode down to the quay, handed the Phrygian the bags of gold and the King's ring, and took his place

upon the ship which was to bear him to Lycia. The offering of red wine was poured upon the salt waters, the ship, freed from her moorings, shot through the harbour to the open sea, and ere long Bellerophon had left behind him a town where only one man had turned against him; but, losing the friendship of Prœtus, he had lost his second home, and was near to losing his very life also.

We can guess that the King of Argos was none the happier for having banished his good friend so hastily. The blank that he had thus made in his life could never be filled, for in all the length and breadth of Greece there was no such loving and trusty a prince as Bellerophon. But the King's grief was as nothing compared with the Queen's remorse. He had banished his friend because he believed him guilty of a great crime; she, on the other hand, had brought about the punishment of the man whom she had admired above all others, and the dishonour which she had thrown upon his name she knew to be quite undeserved. She had accused him falsely, had done him the greatest wrong she could devise, and, having done so, she suffered such misery from her evil conscience that life became unbearable to her.

Only a few days after Bellerophon had sailed from Argos, she disappeared from the royal palace. Her attendants searched in vain for their mistress through the gardens and green walks where she had often before paced in moody silence. This time she had wandered farther. On the branches of sweetbriar that trailed across the paths of the pleasance, they found a few golden threads and fragments of a fine silk robe, that showed the Queen had brushed past these bushes in haste to escape from her own grounds, but where her footsteps led beyond that point they could not discover. Day after day the King

sent out messengers, who scoured the country for news of her. Not a single person came forward to explain the mystery of her disappearance, and as time went on, the Argives came to see that she was gone for ever. They did not pretend to mourn her loss, nor was the King inconsolable when it was borne in upon him that his cold-hearted consort had deserted him, and that, whether alive or dead, she would never be seen again in his land.

The manner of the Queen's end was known only to two people. It was an old fisherman who came one morning to his wife with this story:

"At dead of night I was on my way along the shore, carrying our last haul of fish to early market at Argos. Well, I had gone but half way through the beech wood that crowns the highest of our cliffs when I caught sight of a white figure standing at the edge of the wood, looking down upon the sea. It was a woman's form—so much I could make out even in the darkness—but I could not have told who she was, if she had not been wailing of her plight and talking wildly to herself. Wife, it was Queen Sthenobœa! I heard her cry that she, Sthenobœa, was the most wretched mortal upon earth, and that the thought of the wrong she had done was driving her crazy. She had torn off her jewelled girdle, and fastened it upon a tree, as though she would hang herself by it, but ere I could come near and try to calm her she had chosen another death. With a last wild cry she leaped from the cliffs down into the sea that was raging far below. Ah! a dreadful end it was that she put to her life.

"Tell me, goodwife, what should I do about the matter? See, I have brought home her girdle, which was hanging upon the bough. Shall I take it to the king, and tell him

all that I saw, or shall we say naught, but pick the jewels out of the belt, and sell them to make ourselves the richer?"

"Nay, nay," cried his wife; "do neither. We should do ill to try and make money out of the girdle that the hapless Queen wore; believe me, that would only bring us into trouble. And what good, again, could come from telling the King how you saw his queen perish? He would, like enough, punish you for not having run forward in time to save her. Take your boat, goodman, and row out to the nets in our bay; cut from them the heaviest weight you can find, and bind to it the telltale girdle. Then row out to deeper water, and let it drop to the bottom of the sea. You and I will be wise enough not to say one word about what we know of the Queen's death. Fewest words are safest, goodman."

The fisherman followed his shrewd wife's advice. The girdle was thrown into the sea, and no one save this couple ever knew how Sthenobœa, who years ago had left Lycia, a bride of fairest promise, came in her husband's kingdom to a wretched and self-sought end.

But of the man whom she wronged we are to hear something more.

Bellerophon in Lycia

WHEN Bellerophon set foot in Lycia, he was prepared to face further troubles with a proud scorn of fate and a stout determination that, let friends fail him who might, he would play his part manfully to the end. His first duty was to deliver the casket of Prœtus into the hands of Jobates, King of Lycia, and this he was not long in accomplishing, for ready admission to the palace was granted to any seafarer who came with news of other countries. In company with his fellow-voyagers, who had often visited the court, Bellerophon made his way to the King's presence. The sharp eyes of Jobates recognised many a familiar face amongst the Phrygians, and he nodded a friendly welcome, first to one and then to another of their number. No sooner had he noticed the stranger in their midst than he inquired if he were not that Prince of Corinth who of late had been described as the right hand of Prœtus. It was indeed easy to see that he who wore the magnificent jewelled sword was of different rank from the traders amongst whom he stood; and further, that this was indeed the Prince Bellerophon was quite evident to the King, who had listened to many accounts of the person and valour of the renowned Corinthian.

Bellerophon made modest answer to Jobates, and told

him that what he had done at Argos was no more than the service due to Prœtus for sheltering a fugitive in his palace. Then he handed the casket to the Lycian King, and, having delivered his message, craved permission to depart, as he was fain to go in search of adventure in new lands. "Moreover, O King," he added, "methinks I have offended my friend, Prœtus of Argos—though how that should be, I know not—and if I am, in truth, out of favour with him, then it would be unfair to linger in your kingdom, lest I cause ill-feeling between you and him."

But Jobates would not hear of Bellerophon leaving him there and then. He said that he would find it hard to believe any ill of the frank-spoken Prince, and he begged him to be his guest until at least he heard some reason why they could not continue to be friends; so just as Prœtus had once pressed his hospitality upon the Corinthian, Jobates, in his turn, now insisted upon entertaining him. Feasting and games were proclaimed in honour of the guest, and nine days passed merrily before Jobates remembered to unlock the casket sent by Prœtus. The contents he showed to no one, but Bellerophon could not fail to see that in the casket had been sent some warning or charge against the bearer, for no sooner had the King opened it than he summoned him to his presence, and in an anxious and constrained voice, cautioned him to quit Lycia for a safer country. Having given him this piece of advice most guardedly, the King hurried out of the chamber, clearly to avoid being questioned, while Bellerophon remained behind, pondering over the hard buffetings of fortune. A light footstep caused him to look up to see who was breaking in upon his solitude; and at the sight of her who was coming towards him, he started

in bewilderment, thinking that it was no other than Sthenobœa, Queen of Argos. He saw his mistake when he met the glance of a pair of bright eyes that were as soft as Sthenobœa's had been hard. The younger daughter of Jobates, she who had stolen up to speak to the Prince, had the same lovely form and features as her sister, but otherwise there was all the difference in the world between the two. The elder had none of the kindness and sweetness that made Philonoë so dearly loved by her people, and the unscrupulous acts of which Sthenobœa had often been guilty, would have been impossible to the younger sister, who was as truthful and honourable as Bellerophon himself.

She looked timidly towards the Corinthian Prince before she spoke. Then, with an effort to overcome her shyness, she told him that he was well known to her by sight, because she had seen him taking part in the games of the last few days, and that she had come now to bid him flee for his life from Lycia. Surprised that she was aware of the danger which overshadowed him in Jobates' country, Bellerophon asked what had suggested to her that his life was no longer safe.

"It was a dream," she answered. "I dreamed that I was walking through our land of Lycia, where the ground was covered with poisonous snakes that writhed about my feet. To me they were harmless, because they seemed to be of my own kin; but when I saw you approach, my heart sank, for I knew that upon you they would work certain death. I strove in vain to warn you. Careless, or perchance unconscious, of the danger, you drew nearer, and then, just as we met, a serpent raised his head, and fastened his poisonous fangs upon you. The venom did its work; you fell dead, methought, and through my after

dreams I heard the echo: '*Bellerophon is dead, Bellerophon is dead.*' "

Almost before the last words were breathed from her lips, Philonoë turned and slipped out of the chamber, leaving behind her a man who was thinking, not of the peril she had warned him against, but of the tender-hearted Princess herself. To set out from Lycia in search of greater safety, appeared suddenly to him an impossibility, since it meant deserting the country where this low-voiced, soft-eyed maiden had her home; but as he must at least quit the palace of the estranged Jobates, he determined to ask if he could not serve him on the field of battle or on embassy to some neighbouring court. Acting upon this resolution, he went to speak to Jobates in his hall of audience, though little did he think as he entered, that there would just then await him the very opportunity which he sought.

Crowding around the doors and standing dejectedly before the King's throne, was a band of woe-begone soldiers. Some had lost their weapons; some were in such tattered, blood-stained array as showed they had been fighting for dear life; while others, faint with weariness, were leaning against the pillars to give their feeble limbs what rest they could. Their captain quailed beneath the searching questions of Jobates, who sat with flushed, angry face, listening to the story of a disgraceful defeat. Now the King was at heart much surprised to see Bellerophon appear in his hall after the solemn warning he had received, but, masking his feelings, he exclaimed: "Listen, I pray you, to this pretty story! I sent these fine warriors of mine across the hills to make an end of the feeble Solymi, a rude people who are unskilled in arms, and who have not even the grace to ask aid of the gods. A more

contemptible foe you would hardly find, and lo! they have utterly crushed my men. What will you, Bellerophon? You have spoken aforetime of going in quest of great deeds of arms. Will you lead my troops straightway against the Solymi?"

It was quite clear to Bellerophon that the King wished to thrust him into the jaws of death, but his desire to remain bound to the Lycian court overruled all other considerations, and he immediately accepted the proposal. "But I must ask your prayers for my success," he added, looking hard at Jobates, "for I doubt me that in this matter there are greater dangers in store than any I have yet encountered."

The King was visibly ill at ease, though he struggled to appear unconscious of the stern glance and words of Bellerophon. He answered, as best he might, that he would certainly pray the gods to give Lycia the victory, and that, whatever befell, he thanked Bellerophon heartily for his readiness to brave the enemy.

Having agreed to set out from the city in two days' time, Bellerophon busied himself reviewing his troops and endeavouring to inspire them with something of his own courage. By nightfall of the second day his preparations were at last completed, and he was resting alone in a quiet porch when he saw a white-robed maid crossing the grass towards where he stood. His heart beat faster while he wondered if perchance the slender figure might be Philonoë, of whom he was even then dreaming. It was not the Princess, however, but one of her attendants, who, coming up to him, put into his hands a sheathed sword, with a message from her young mistress that the blade was not to be drawn from its scabbard until Bellerophon found himself alone, and further, that the lady

Philonoë prayed him not to delay unsheathing it. There was little need to give the Prince the second part of that message, for no sooner had the maid disappeared than he hastened to his room, and drew out the bright sword. As he did so a note slipped out of the sheath, and unfolding the sheet, he read in Philonoë's handwriting an entreaty that he should leave the country that very night, as there was a plot against his life, and if he marched against the Solymi there was little chance that he would return alive.

"Gird on this sword," the words ran, "and go down to the quay to-night; there you will meet a seaman followed by two men with torches. They will ask you, 'Is the sword drawn?' and you must answer, 'Yes, and the wound healed.' By that sign you will recognise one another. The seaman is trusty. He will take you on board his vessel, and by morning you will be at a safe distance from our shores. I pray you do this, for I fear that something constrains you to stay with us, Lycians, to your hurt."

Bellerophon was unshaken in his resolve to wait in Lycia and lead the army against the Solymi as he had promised, but he was much touched by Philonoë's care for him. He smiled as he read how she had arranged everything to further his escape, and he only wished that he could tell her, what perhaps she had already guessed, that it was love for her which kept him amongst her people. Proudly he girded on her sword, and fearlessly he went to the King's hall to spend the evening hours with those whom he had good reason to mistrust. He chatted unconcernedly with Jobates, reproved his men's boastings, and again spoke to them cheerily of what lay before them in the approaching campaign; then he ordered every man in his troops to stop feasting at a reasonable hour and

be ready to set out with him at daybreak. His strict discipline was all that the Lycians required to make them excellent soldiers; they knew his worth, too, as a leader, and each man in his heart was proud to serve under the Corinthian.

In the early dawn of the following day he rode out at the head of his troops, and Philonoë, tormented as she was at the thought of the perils before him, was glad, notwithstanding, that her hero had refused to sail away overnight as she had urged him to do.

Seven anxious days passed before news of the army reached Jobates; then on the eighth day a band of horsemen came dashing into the city with tidings that the Solymi had been utterly defeated. "Our men are on their way home," they announced, "but they are bringing so many prisoners and so much booty that their march is slow. And what of our leader? Why, our lord Bellerophon is unhurt; surely he bears a charmed life! He stood alone upon the wall when we had stormed the stronghold and the Solymi had risen again to beat us back, and while the darts were falling thick about him, he took as little thought of his safety as though he had been in a shower of summer rain. 'Twas his example that gave us heart to turn upon the enemy and gain our victory."

Whatever the King felt when he heard that Bellerophon was still alive, he was unfeignedly delighted to learn that under his leadership the Lycians had been so signally successful. Straightway he proclaimed a great public thanksgiving; and so overjoyed were the townspeople by the news of victory that when the Prince rode back with his army to their gates, they gave him a splendid ovation.

While many were pressing forward to welcome Beller-

ophon back to the city, there was one who hung back, but who was, nevertheless, infinitely the most thankful for his safe return, and that was the Princess Philonoë. But knowing that he ran great risks if he lingered near her father's court, she pleaded with him, the first morning that they met alone, to seek another country. Bellerophon laughed at her fears. He told her that for the joy of seeing her every day, he would live in the midst of earth's greatest perils and be unmoved. To banish him from the city, the Princess would have to find a better pretext than this vague talk of dangers overhanging him. His cheerful words did not by any means reassure her; but love for each other made the two young people fain to be together a little longer, and love, too, made them strong to meet whatever troubles might befall them. And so Bellerophon remained at the palace of King Jobates.

One of the most important events in the Lycians' calendar was the annual festival held in honour of the goddess Diana. On that day a golden statue of the Huntress was drawn by a team of white oxen through the town, a band of maidens accompanying it, bare-kneed, with bow in hand and a quiver upon the shoulder, after the fashion of the goddess herself. In olden times it had been the custom to offer human sacrifice at this feast, and a reminder of these cruel days still existed in the following rites. The maiden attendants of Diana seize three girls (previously chosen by lot to take this part), and carry them off, as if for sacrifice upon the altar of the goddess. Just as the priest raises his knife to slay the three victims, the King of the country appears with three white deer decked for the altar, a great golden horn, a branch of flowering thorn wrought in silver, and a richly embroidered

silk robe—all of which he prays Diana to accept as ransom for the maidens. The exchange is agreed to, and all ends happily with the release of the three young girls, when the goddess has been appeased with the offerings placed by the King's own hands in her temple and by the sacrifice of the milk-white deer upon her altar.

The day for these celebrations having come round, market and harbour were both closed, and all the townsfolk assembled in their holiday attire to do honour to Diana. The car which bore the image of the goddess was made ready for the procession, and the oxen strained forward as the horns blared to mark the opening of the ceremony, but not an inch could the team move their burden. It was not that the car was too heavy or that the oxen were unwilling ; they pulled stubbornly beneath the yoke ; the priests wearied themselves with prayers to Diana to suffer the procession to move forward, but all was in vain—the car remained unmovable, and at last it had to be admitted that the goddess would not allow her image to be borne through the streets that morning. To offer what they could of her accustomed honours, the Lycians went on with the rest of the ceremony, and three maidens were duly seized and borne to her shrine. Alas ! further ill omens occurred to terrify the people. One of the maids suddenly fell to the ground before the altar, shrieking wildly and shamefully in a fit of madness. That in itself was ominous enough ; but when the three deer were brought out for sacrifice, only two were slain in due fashion. The third tossed his antlers free of the priest's guiding hand, and had all but escaped his fate when a soldier completed the sum of disasters by thrusting his spear into the hart's side, with the impious words : "Foolish goddess that thou hast been to-day ! Think

not, Diana, that we shall wait patiently till it suits thy humour to accept our gifts. Go to what land thou wilt, we of Lycia will make suit to thee no longer!"

Nothing was done to repair the insult of these words or to turn the goddess from the wrath which clearly she nursed against Lycia. The people crept home in small parties, afraid almost to speak of the ill omens they had witnessed, and seeing in the darkening sky sure signs of a storm presently to visit their city and work vengeance upon them, because in some way they had angered the maiden goddess.

Bellerophon, being an alien, was excluded from these rites, and had therefore quitted the town to spend the day hunting upon the hills. As the morning wore on, he noticed the gathering clouds, but just as he was turning to seek shelter, a much more alarming sight than torrents of rain or flashes of lightning caught his eyes. Far away in the east he saw a speck of fire, which spread rapidly in all directions even as he stood watching for a few moments, and the certainty grew upon him that it was through no common mishap, but by the hand of an enemy, that the crops of Lycia were now burning. He rode hastily back to the town, hoping that timely measures would be taken for the safety of the city; but his warnings, alas! fell upon heedless ears, because the greater part of the people were so overcome by fear of Heaven's wrath that they could not realise the danger of a mortal foe. The raging storm added to the gloom of the city; yet despite the tempest and the public indifference to his words, Bellerophon set to work, and raised a band of soldiers, who swore to be ready to ride out against the enemy at whatever hour he summoned them.

At midnight, when the storm had all but spent itself,

the warders at the gate heard the furious galloping of horses. Nearer and nearer came the sound, until a troop of horsemen stopped beneath the walls of the city, and hammered loudly upon the heavy iron gates, while in wild accents they begged in Heaven's name for shelter from the fury of an inhuman foe. The warders were such cowards that they would have kept the poor wretches outside their walls rather than open the gates for a single instant, but Bellerophon, riding up just then to learn the tidings, rated them soundly for their mean spirit, and forced them to give admittance to the fugitives. Only when the terrified riders saw the gates securely fastened behind them, would they reply to the shower of questions put by the guard. Then they told how the country was devastated by the cruellest foe that they had yet known. Man, woman, and child had alike been put to the sword, as if the invaders had vowed to raise a trophy out of the bleached bones of the Lycians. The shrines of Diana were overthrown, and this and all their other infamous deeds seemed the more horrible because the enemy were women!

On hearing that it was only an army of womenfolk that was approaching, the faint-hearted amongst the throng of listeners revived in spirit—to fall into deeper despondency, however, when they were told that the invaders were more like demons than human beings. The evil tidings roused Bellerophon to instant action. Impatiently turning away from the excited talk, he blew a loud blast upon his horn, whereupon his sworn followers gathered speedily to join their beloved leader.

"Let King Jobates know that I have taken these his men to meet the enemy," said Bellerophon to the captain of the guard, who stood shivering at the gates; then he

mounted his steed, and as the gates flew open at his command, he dashed out with his troops into the darkness of the night.

The tidings brought by the countryfolk caused fresh panic amongst the townspeople next morning. Some of the richest citizens secretly hired the trading boats that happened to be lying in the harbour, and by heavy bribes they got themselves, their wives, children, and slaves, and much of their treasure, carried safely out to sea beyond the reach of the invaders; but so greatly did such flight increase the alarm and despair of the poorer people, who could not afford to hire boats, that before long that means of escape had to be forbidden by public order, and the harbour lined with a guard to turn back all townsfolk. In the general excitement and confusion, King Jobates lost all authority over his people. He was, in fact, distracted by the same fears that oppressed every one he met except Philonoë. She alone was unmoved by the rumours that went from mouth to mouth, for she, above all others, had faith in Bellerophon's guardianship. The more people talked of dangers, the more scornfully did the Princess look on them. She kept her maids busy with their usual work; she chid them when they gave way to foolish terror; and throughout the days of suspense she was ever calm and courageous.

At length came news from Bellerophon. A wearied messenger pushed through the streets, and, entering the palace, laid a scroll in the King's hand.

"Bellerophon sendeth greeting to King Jobates and his household," ran the letter. "Let the King rejoice, for the hordes of women who laid waste his lands are now scattered; yea, and before many days are passed, the remnant of their army will be brought captive to the city."

Fear and sadness were turned into great joy when this news was made known amongst the citizens. Sacrifices of thanksgiving were laid upon every altar, and when the priests had paid special worship to Diana, they yoked the white oxen to the car which had failed to draw her image through the streets a few days before. The joy of the people was complete when now the car moved easily upon its way—a sign that the victory of Bellerophon had been accepted by the goddess in full satisfaction for the insult offered to her in Lycia by the pillagers of her shrines.

When the hero returned with his army and their train of captives, his entry into the city was celebrated with much more pomp and ceremony than upon his return from the campaign against the Solymi. A procession of minstrels and dancers met him with glad songs, and went before him up the thronged streets. Behind his troops came a hideous band of captives—women-warriors clad, some in the skins of wild beasts, some in the fine robes that they had torn from the Lycian maids whom they had slaughtered. Their queen was an old woman who sat upon a brazen car, her chained hands still grasping a battle-axe, her heavy crown of gold cast at her feet, and the blood of her victims still staining her white hair where she had wiped her gory hand across her brow.

Princess Philonoë looked at first with pity and curiosity upon the women prisoners, but when one walked past with a scalp slung at her belt, decked out in a robe that had been taken from the corpse of a Lycian lady, and laughing hideously when the people shrank from her, then the Princess closed her eyes firmly to keep out the sight of such horrors. Presently an outburst of cheers and hearty shouts made her look down again upon the street, and she saw, in the rear of the procession, Beller-

ophon himself riding past upon his black charger. The laurel-crowned victor looked up into the blue eyes that had shyly opened at his coming, and in them he read that her love for him burned as brightly as did his for her. Yet they durst give no outward sign of their joy at meeting; and even when they met that evening within the banquet-hall, she could make him no more than a formal little speech of praise and welcome, lest Jobates should suspect their deep attachment.

Some months having passed uneventfully, the King was sitting in his judgment-hall on an autumn morning when, above the voices of those pleading before him, he heard an unwonted clamour at the doors. A guard came forward to tell him that an excited band of countrymen craved speech with him, and by his order one of the number was presently admitted. The man was at first powerless to speak. He trembled from head to foot, and though he opened his lips again and again, no sound came from them.

"I fear me his news is bad," said Jobates. "Let him have a bowl of wine to give him fresh heart, and then he will tell us what has frightened him so sorely."

The remedy proved worth its trial. After the countryman had drunk the wine, his courage returned to him in some measure, and he began his tale.

"Know, O King, that I am one of the poor peasants in your land who lost home and goods alike when the fell army of women laid waste the country. Having nothing left of my own, I went to serve my brother, whose farm is in the west of Lycia, and there we lived happily enough until yesterday's sun shone upon horrors that have driven me nigh crazy.

"We had but started our vintage, and, as the custom

was, we called in numbers of our neighbours to help us to gather the grapes. At daybreak yesterday they flocked to our homestead, and after we had feasted them at our long tables in the vineyard, we all set blithely to work upon the vine-rows. The young men and maids were laughing and singing on the lower slopes that run down to the mill stream, and I chanced to be alone at the higher end of the vineyard, when all at once the sky grew hazy with an evil-smelling, greenish vapour, and a strange, rasping sound caught my ears. I straightened myself to look from what quarter this stiflingly hot air was coming, and lo! even as I raised my eyes, the most hideous sight met my gaze. Ah, King," shrieked the poor man, as the horror of his tale swept over him afresh—" ah, King, save us from the evil in your land! Bar all the gates; find us deep dungeons for our homes, if so be that we can there escape this unspeakable bane!" With difficulty the King's guard quieted the fellow, and in time he was able to continue his story.

" How can I tell you of the monster who was close upon us? All that I know for a certainty is that it breathed forth a hot, poisonous blast, which scorched everything before it; that its great round eyes were flaming fire; that its cry was like the hissing of countless snakes, mingled with the rasping of blade drawn edgewise across blade; and that its head was like unto a lion's, its body shaggy as a goat's, and its tail long, coiled, and scaly. It had sped through the fields swifter even than a maddened charger. Hardly had I time to rise and behold it; no time had I to warn the others or to save myself. Those who worked on the lower slopes perchance never saw the creature that slew them; their heads were still bent over the vine-rows when death was breathed upon them from those fiery

nostrils. As for myself, I fell senseless at the monster's oncoming, and how it was that ever I escaped death, I cannot tell. For hours I must have lain in a deep swoon, and when at length consciousness returned, and I looked around, hardly could I believe that my senses had come back to me. The world of dreams never showed a sight so fearful as the desolation I saw before me. Upon the slopes of the old vineyard not a human being, not a bush, no, not a blade of grass, was to be seen. The earth was scorched bare, and upon the site of our old homestead was a mass of ruins, where the last flames of a fierce fire were still flickering.

"My limbs shook beneath me, yet I gathered strength to flee; often I stumbled, but I rose, and ran again, until I came to fields where there were no traces of the monster. Then I fell in with the men who led me here to tell my tale, though Heaven knows that I am little fit to speak." As he said the last words, the poor man sank down, utterly worn out with terror and exhaustion, and the King's guard had to bear him from the hall.

The King then ordered the other countrymen to be admitted, who, though without any such dreadful tale to relate, had yet various pieces of evidence to give. They told how yesterday they had seen a great fire smouldering on the hills west of their dwellings, and how one of them had met a man in full flight, his body cruelly wounded and bearing marks of burning. Another told of the hideous roaring that had echoed from the western hills, and still another, of the parching and evil-smelling air that had swept across their countryside. From these accounts the King knew that the first story was true, at least in part, and that he had to deal with a grievous trouble in his land. What man would dare to hunt down the strange

monster? The answer that came at once to the King's mind was, Bellerophon. Now Bellerophon, in his love for Philonoë, remained still in her father's service, but at the present time he chanced to be away in pursuit of a Tyrrhenian pirate who had been doing great injury to the Lycian traders of late, and so Jobates had to find another man to undertake the slaying of the monstrous creature. He chose a certain captain, of good repute for his valour, and sent him with a band of eighty stout men-at-arms upon the dangerous quest. Alas! a day had not passed before the oldest man in the party came staggering back to the city, his son, who had ridden out by his side, now lying dead across his saddle-bow, and he himself the only man who had escaped alive. But how the others met their death no one ever knew, for the survivor spent three days in speechless grief, and on the fourth morning he was found dead.

After that ill-fated expedition no further attempt was made to destroy the monster. That the tales told of its ravages were all too true, became day after day more certain, as panic-stricken countryfolk flocked to the city with fresh tidings of the havoc wrought throughout the length and breadth of Lycia. Even within the stout walls of the city the people lived in terror of their lives, and it was an unspeakable relief to sovereign and subjects alike, when one morning Bellerophon's ship was at last sighted. The *Sea-hawk*—for that was the name he had given her—sailed proudly into the harbour, her masts hung with the shields of the pirates, and on the top-mast, fixed upon a spear, was the head of the pirate chief who had been the curse of merchants for years past.

Bellerophon's first act was to walk to Jove's temple, there to give thanks for his victory and to offer at the

shrine a tenth part of his spoil. It would be an ill omen, said the townsmen, to speak to him of trouble upon land ere he had done reverence to the god for peace vouchsafed at sea, and so he to whom the eyes of the whole people were turning in hope of succour, heard nothing of the terror in the land until, in crossing the great square to the temple, he chanced to hear a herald making proclamation :—

" The word of Jobates, King of Lycia. Let all men know that, whereas our land is now desolated by an unknown and fearful monster, and that I, being old and unused to arms, may not myself essay its destruction, yet am I willing to give to any man who will rid the land of this plague, the hand of my fair daughter Philonoë and an equal share with me in the government of my kingdom. So may the gods help us ! "

With bated breath Bellerophon listened to the herald's words, and with brighter hopes than had ever yet burned in his breast, he went upon his way, dreaming of the glorious chance that Fortune now offered him. He had for the moment no curiosity to know what might be the nature of the monster to be slain—sufficient that, by its destruction, he would win the Princess ; already, in his dreams, the creature lay slain by his sword !

Having ended his service at Jove's temple, he hastened to tell King Jobates how he had prospered in his attack upon the pirates. For a time they talked over the events of the expedition, then the King made an allusion to what, as it happened, was uppermost in the other's mind. " 'Tis indeed well that we shall suffer no more hurt from these pirates, Bellerophon, yet the troubles of our country are not near an end. It seems to me as though the gods would rid the rest of the world of plagues and pests by

sending them all into this small land of Lycia, so many have visited us of late—and the last is ever the worst." Then, in answer to Bellerophon's inquiries, the King told him all the reports current about the fiery monster, and straightway received his offer to go forth against it.

"You have vowed that you will give a certain rich reward to him who rids the land of this pest," remarked Bellerophon, as their talk drew to a close, "but if to keep this late vow should cause you to break another made aforetime, which would you hold to—the old vow or the new?"

The King started up in such confusion of face that he showed the question touched him painfully. He stammered in reply that if Bellerophon returned victorious from the adventure he would certainly receive his due reward; but the insincerity which underlay this answer did not escape the Corinthian.

Jobates breathed more freely when he had said farewell to the clear-eyed young Prince. "Would Heaven the next few weeks were over!" was his fervent prayer as he thought of the difficulties that lay before him and the dilemma which he had to face. Presently he summoned the captain of the guard, and gave him orders to keep watch at the city gates, so that what tidings arrived concerning the monster, might be instantly carried to the palace.

"Question every man who comes from the country parts of Lycia," he said, "for now that the Prince Bellerophon is setting out on his adventure, we may have news of grave importance ere long. What think you, my captain, of the champion's chances of success?"

The captain answered that, to his thinking, Bellerophon

was likely to return triumphant. "He faces mortal dangers as though they held no risk for him, and though he enjoys life so heartily himself, he looks scornfully, aye, witheringly, at those who think of securing their safety in the hour of peril. At times we fancy he must be a god in disguise; but however that may be, I own, sire, that I hate to see him in our town. Our misfortunes date from the time he first arrived to throw our valour into the shade, and to dazzle the common folk by his godlike prowess."

"Aha, you bear him a grudge!" cried the King. "Then, if ever he return from this foolhardy enterprise, would you care to bring about his death? Our townspeople, who worship him so madly, could easily be led to believe that their hero, having fully accomplished the deliverance of our country, had retired to his proper place amongst the gods!"

With a knowing glance at the King, the captain replied that such a scheme rather fell in with his own humour, but that if he contrived to cut short the Prince's career, he would expect to fall heir to the rewards that must else have been bestowed upon the slayer of the monster. His sinister words satisfied the King, who raised no objection to his demand. "Enough for the present," said he. "Come to me in the morning, and we will speak further of the matter."

Even while these two were talking, Bellerophon had ridden away from the palace. So eager was he to enter on the quest that he was beyond the city gates by sundown, having waited only to seek a quiet moment with the Princess. He found her by the door of the great hall, and when she marvelled to see him again in armour, seeing that it was but a few hours since he returned from his last exploit, he answered that he had girded

on his sword that very day to do battle with the strange creature who was even then devastating the land. Then, although she knew well what would be her lot for days to come—an agony of suspense, followed perchance by the breaking of her heart if the gods were so cruel as to let her hero's life be sacrificed—she kept up her courage, and bade him good speed upon his errand; and he, spurring forth from the palace, felt that no task, set by god or man, could prove too hard, if the doing of it gave him the title to claim such a brave, loving, and noble bride.

After his interview with the King next morning, the captain of the guard took his stand at the gates of the city, awaiting news of Bellerophon and the monster. The day passed slowly and dismally; fugitives of every description were fleeing for refuge within the walls. Even the priestesses of a sacred temple some ten leagues distant from the city came trembling, wild-eyed, and half-frenzied because the unknown creature menaced their very shrine. But no tidings could the captain gather about the Corinthian Prince. Darkness fell, and still he waited at his post. Then at last, when the greyness of dawn was creeping across the land, he saw a mail-clad horseman, at whose coming he flung open the gates, and on whose face he instantly read news—good news for the country. Curtly he bade the stranger keep silence, if he bore tidings of the monster, until they reached the King's presence; then, riding by his side to the palace, he roused the sleepy warders, and gained admittance to Jobates' chamber.

"Pardon us, O sire. We bring you news of the fell creature," he said, gently awakening the King. Then

in a different tone: "Speak up, man, and let my master have your story."

"The news is good, O King; the monster has been slain by a brave knight. And if it please you, my lord, this is what I know about its killing.

"I and two other men were fain to risk our lives in an encounter with the dread waster of our country. So armed in this coat-of-mail, which my father told me a cunning man had once rendered proof against death blows or mortal injuries, I set out with my friends two days ago. Following the tracks of the beast through the scorched countryside, we saw that it lurked somewhere in the lands adjoining the temple of Minerva across our western plains.

"At nightfall, having reached the temple, we sought out the priests, told them of our resolve, and prayed that we might abide with them overnight. The priests made answer that so near had the creature now drawn to their dwelling that they had gathered together what things they could bear with them, and only awaited daybreak to flee from a spot where, seemingly, not even the goddess could protect them. They counselled us instantly to quit their grounds, nor dream of attacking an enemy whom to face was certain death. We held to our purpose, however, and, seeing that their words could not prevail with us, they gave us refreshment, such as they had, whereafter we three comrades laid ourselves down to sleep in a chamber on the north wall of the temple.

"The night was but half spent when I was awakened by heart-rending shrieks of terror and the most hideous noise, piercing as the blast that hisses forth from a great furnace. I sprang up, and beheld one of my comrades lying deathlike on the floor, and the other, rushing in

wildest frenzy round and round the room, powerless even to hide himself from the danger. Through the casement shone a ghastly, white light; the monster, I knew in a twinkling, was within the temple precincts!

"A sudden recklessness and scorn of death took hold of me in that awful hour, and helped me, for a time at least, to play the man. I flung on my armour, and made my way to the main hall through a cloud of sulphurous, suffocating smoke. On the pavement of the hall lay men dead or dying; some writhed beneath the statue of the goddess Minerva, who looked down upon them with calm face, unmoved by their agonies; others had crawled behind the pillars in the vain hope of finding shelter. Despite the dense smoke, I made shift to reach the door at the far end of the hall, for there, I judged, I would find the monster. The ghastly light that had shone into our bedchamber became clearer again to my eyes as I groped my way across the hall. It would wane for a moment, then anon there would be a throb, and again it would burst forth, throwing a lurid glow upon all around.

"I was nigh the farther door before I caught a glimpse of the monster itself. Through the clouds of smoke loomed a pair of great, bloodshot, fiery eyes, a heavy, shaggy head, and an enormous bulk of body covered with tufts of grey hair. Never was the creature motionless for one second. Amid its snorting and bellowing it was constantly heaving up and down, at one instant seeming to have swollen twice the size that it had been a moment earlier, and from its sides there shot out hideous black claws that ever and again snatched up a victim and drew him to his doom. On the ground before me lay an armed man, and even as I stood and marked the beast, I heard his armour ring beneath a sudden stroke, and saw the

poor fellow drawn into the heart of that awful mass from which the long feelers had been stretched out stealthily to seize its prey.

" The horror of the scene overcame me. Just as I should have thrown myself with drawn sword upon the brute, I turned faint. The steel slipped from my fingers ; stooping to raise it, I staggered, and then, as a clear trumpet blast rang in my ears above the hideous snortings, I sank upon the ground, and knew no more.

" The next that I heard was a kindly voice bidding me rise and be of good cheer, for the creature which I had essayed to slay, lay dead before me. When the mist had cleared from my eyes, I saw a knight in armour bending over me. O sire, never will I forget what a goodly sight he was ! I doubt not he was young, but he had the look of one who had overcome the troubles of a lifetime and had learned courage and endurance thereby, so godlike he was, so fearless.

" He told me how he had come up to the temple at dead of night in pursuit of the monster, and had blown a loud blast upon his trumpet that the priests might know help was at hand. Just as I fell, he had dashed forward and slain the monster. ' It cost me no little blood,' said he, ' ere I could make an end of it.'

" By this time dawn was at hand, and when I peered down upon the ground before us, I was able, in the dim light, to descry a gory mass of rough, clotted hair and the scaly coils of a dragon's tail around it. It was no sight to linger over, and gladly I turned away from it to help the knight to bathe his wounds, for indeed they bled sorely, and methinks they showed how that his life had been in great jeopardy. When we had stanched the bleeding, we went around the temple to see if any men were

left alive. My two friends, I found, lay dead without a wound; and dead was every other man in the place—most of them, like my comrades, killed by fear alone.

"When broader daylight came, we set about to examine the carcass of the beast. The ground on which it lay was drenched with its dark blood, while, in the midst of this sea of gore, the great hulk stood like a wreck stranded in a shallow bay. Like the broadside of a wreck, too, were its lean ribs, and when, marvelling at its spareness, we pressed closer to the body, we were astounded to find that the flesh had completely withered away! Only the dried skin remained, drawn tight across its bones; even its teeth were already falling out of their sockets, for many of them we found lying in the pool of blood beneath its head. In how short a time was the deadly creature crumbling into harmless dust! 'Well,' said its slayer, 'we must take at least its skull to the King. You showed the right spirit, my friend, when you rose to face this enemy last night, so, if you will, do now what you would fain have done then: cut off its head, and bear it to King Jobates for a token that his land is freed from the pest.' Then he bade me tell you, O sire, that he who had done the deed was the exile from Corinth, and that on the morrow he would come to claim his due reward.

"With right good will I hewed off the monster's head, and tied it to my saddle-bow, and then with a humble farewell to the knight, I rode off across the plains. For many a league through the richer part of our country, the tracks of the fell brute showed like paths burnt black and bare, and the land was desolate, as though a foreign army had swept down on it and killed every soul. I counted upon reaching the city ere nightfall, but by midday so heavy a drowsiness came over me that I

could not but stop to rest by the wayside. I laid myself down upon the grass, holding my horse's reins in my hand, and so fell fast asleep.

" When I awoke it was moonlight, and my horse, with loose reins, was grazing near by. He came to me at my call, but much was I disturbed when I saw that the head of the monster no longer hung from the saddle. There was no one to have stolen it whilst I slept. I searched around, but it had not fallen upon the grass ; only, as my eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, I was able to trace a line of grey ashes that marked where the horse had strayed in search of pasture. They were the ashes of the skull, which had crumbled away within a few short hours !

" At first I thought it were idle to bring you this strange tale without a token to prove its truth, but when I called to mind how strictly the knight charged me to bear the tidings to the palace, I mounted and came upon my way. Doubt me if it please you to-day, O King, but ere long you will be assured that I have spoken no falsehood, for the pest will never again trouble your land."

The King and his captain stared blankly at one another when the tale was ended. They were alike pleased to learn that the dreadful monster was slain, but that the Corinthian Prince had done the deed, and was returning to claim his due reward, caused Jobates great distress. He had trusted that in this adventure Bellerophon would surely lose his life, and now he was awakened to find that once more, against his will, he would have to plot the destruction of the man whom in his heart he could not but admire, and against whom he himself bore no grudge.

The silence that had fallen for a few seconds on the party was first broken by the captain. " Why, the hero of the day is Prince Bellerophon, I make no doubt," he cried

airily, as though that had not been evident from the outset. "What a great service he has done us, to be sure! He has indeed earned the rich reward you have in store for him, sire."

The King had now recovered himself. He turned to the stranger, and telling him that he saw no reason to disbelieve the story, promised him a meet recompense for the part that he had played in bringing the good news to the city. The man had no hesitation in naming the boon which he most desired: "Let me become the Prince's serving-man," he pleaded; "there is nothing that would please me better."

Then the King remarked that, although he had told them much that they wished to know, he had spoken but hazily about the nature of the unknown monster. "Now tell us distinctly of its shape and size," he urged. "Nay; but, my lord," answered the man, "last night methought I should never be able to put the hideous vision of it out of my mind, and lo! already it has waxed dim and uncertain. They say that it had the tail of a dragon? Nay, I cannot recall if that were so, and belike I erred when I tried to see in it the image of other beasts. When I strive now to picture it, it falls to pieces in the shaping, just as it fell into nothingness after it was slain. Nevertheless, I swear it was in truth a monstrous and a fearful creature."

Just then there arose loud cheers and cries of joy and thanksgiving. Bellerophon had entered the city, and the people, who were now astir, had learned his good tidings, and were escorting him to the great hall of the palace, where, before he had well replied to the many eager questions showered upon him, he received from the captain of the guard a message of congratulation and welcome

from the King. When, some time later, Jobates himself entered the hall, he led beside him the Princess, whose eyes glistened with tears of joy as she heard him make solemn avowal that, in fulfilment of his promise, this, his daughter Philonoë, should on the morrow be wedded to the noble protector of Lycia, Prince Bellerophon, who henceforth should bear equal title and rule with him as king. Through Philonoë's shyness shone such joy that the Lycians cheered more lustily than ever, seeing that this was no loveless contract of marriage, but the betrothal of true and devoted lovers.

To Bellerophon the whole scene appeared like a dream, and when he gave thanks in a few simple words for the priceless gift bestowed by Jobates, his own voice sounded to him far off and unfamiliar. Yet even in this hour of bliss there lurked in his mind a strange sense of insecurity and uneasiness. He looked upon the sea of upturned faces, and felt that he could trust any of the nobles who were standing beneath the dais; but as for the King and the crafty captain beside him, they were both so obviously playing a double part that he felt his life to be no safer in their company than it had been when he faced the monster in the temple of Minerva.

It was the eve of her wedding-day, and although midnight had come, Philonoë was too busy with her thoughts about the future to be able to sleep. She was oppressed with a dread that even yet Bellerophon might not be safe from secret enemies; and after vainly trying to overcome her forebodings, she determined at last that, late as it was, she would steal down the broad staircase to the shrine of Minerva, and make supplication to the goddess on her lover's behalf.

There was, seemingly, no one else afoot in that part of the palace when the Princess crept softly down to the court, in the centre of which stood Minerva's temple; but as she walked along the cloisters, she heard a muffled clash of arms and the sound of approaching footsteps. Hastily she slipped into the shadow of a pillar, not a moment too soon if she wished to escape notice, for immediately a man dressed in full armour stepped out of the grove of olive-trees that fringed the sacred enclosure, looked all around, then ran up the steps into the temple. The man had scarcely disappeared before another and another came stealthily out from various points, and darted across the patch of moonlight to the temple door. Philonoë counted that ten men had mustered, each with a sword at his side, and all so furtive in their movements that she felt certain they were there for no good purpose. She waited until she saw that no more were coming, then she picked up her long silk skirts, and cautiously mounted the steps of the temple, where, through a small opening in the folding doors, she saw the ten armed men standing in the dim lamplight within.

A roll of names was being taken. She heard a low voice call: "Milo of Colchis?" and there came a hoarse answer: "Here." "The Clearer of the Shore? Has he come?" Someone replied: "Yes"; and then the first speaker exclaimed that, since their number was complete, they should set to work without delay. "In the Ivory Room of the palace Bellerophon lies sleeping. His serving-men have ere now been drugged, and can make no fight when we ten break into their master's bedchamber. However bold he be, we cannot be beaten by one man single-handed and unarmed; and, moreover, we may even slay him in his sleep. Well,

when we have killed the Unconquerable, you, Clearer of the Shore, shall carry his body down to your boat, row far out, and drop it, heavily weighted, into the sea. The rest of us will burn the bloodstained things that might tell of his death, so that in the morning when the bridegroom is missing, we can say: 'Lo! he has gone and left not a trace of his sojourn amongst us. Truly he was one of the gods, who came down to rescue us from great perils, and now, his labours ended, he has returned to his rightful place!' The people of our town think so much of their hero, see you, that they will readily believe our words, and perchance may comfort themselves by raising a temple to his memory. Ha, ha!"

Poor Philonoë listened to this cruel talk until she had learned all she could of the plot against her lover. Then with a drawn, white face and her lips tightly closed to keep back a gasp of dismay that might betray her, she turned, and crept quietly down the steps to the court, where she broke into the hastiest running that ever princess had attempted. When she reached the door of the Ivory Room she saw that Bellerophon's men were lying around in such a deep stupor that it was useless to attempt rousing them; and so, passing within, she herself picked from off the wall the pieces of armour which her lover would sorely need within the next short hour. There was a helmet, a coat of mail, a spear and a sword, all of which she carried to Bellerophon's bedside, and wakening him with a light touch, she whispered that armed traitors were upon their way to surprise him, and that he must instantly prepare for their attack. So soon as she had roused him she disappeared, and he, donning his armour, stood in readiness for the unknown enemy. Amid the rustling of the autumn leaves, driven by a light wind across

the pavement without, he soon distinguished some stealthy footsteps approaching; in the moonlight that shone across his room he saw the latch of the door slowly raised, and through the widening chink he caught the gleam of drawn swords. Then, just as the door was flung open, he gave a ringing shout, and hurled his spear at the foremost man, who staggered forward, and fell dead across his threshold.

This was not how the conspirators had expected to make their entrance into the Ivory Room. To find their victim alert and fully armed was an unpleasant surprise, and the sight of the spear in their leader's breast completed their discomfiture. They crouched into the shadow beyond the doorway, muttering to one another that they liked not their job. Bellerophon's sword was brandished aloft, another shout rang from his throat, and almost at the same moment the blast of a horn echoed strong and deep through the night air. The nine assassins waited to hear no more; they knew it was the horn of Neptune, which, under pain of death, no one might wind except to bring succour to the King of Lycia; and, taking instantly to flight, they scattered, panic-stricken, in all directions, their paths as devious as the tales they afterwards told of the night's adventures.

Bellerophon, left to himself, crossed the room, and, bending over the man whom he had slain with the spear, saw that it was none other than the captain of the guard. While he stood musing, in scorn rather than anger over his late enemy, he heard again the horn of Neptune, and following upon the blast came the trampling of many feet, and the sound of his own name shouted by a multitude of voices.

Crossing the bloodstained threshold, he passed along

the corridor towards the great hall, whither men were flocking from all quarters, obedient to the loud summons.

Before he had come within sight of the people, however, a slender, white-robed maid glided out of the shadow of a recess, and whispered softly in his ear: "Hark how our men call on you, Bellerophon! Will you go tell them now that all is well with you? It was I who wound the horn, dear heart, to bring you aid against those ten traitors, but, thank the gods! you had no need of our succour." Having spoken thus, Philonoë passed on swiftly to her chamber, and Bellerophon hastened to the hall, where he found an excited crowd of Lycians clamouring to learn what danger threatened the young King's life. So relieved were they to see their hero appear safe and unconcerned amongst them that it was not difficult for him to persuade them that they had been roused by a false alarm. He chaffed them upon their dread of fresh dangers, and told them there was no greater disturbance than had been made by a band of ill-disposed men-at-arms, one of whom now lay slain, while the rest had long since fled. When, by these reassuring words, he had dispersed the people, he turned back to the Ivory Room —its threshold already cleared of the dead body—and laid himself down to think, and presently to dream, of the brave Princess by whose courage and devotion his life had been saved.

On the morrow Bellerophon, no longer in armour, but clad in royal robes of gold, took his seat upon the throne in the great hall, which was thronged with merchants, seafaring folk, and hunters from distant quarters of the kingdom—all of whom came to do homage to their new King, the protector of their trade on land and sea, and to offer him rich and beautiful gifts of ivory, furs, Eastern

merchandise, and wares of their own country. Busied though he was with the people before him, he did not fail to notice that Jobates was absent from the hall, and as time wore on, he wondered ever the more why his fellow-sovereign did not appear. At length a slave approached, carrying in his hand the casket which Bellerophon himself had aforetime brought to Jobates from Prœtus, King of Argos.

"My master, King Jobates," he said, bending humbly before the throne, "prays that King Bellerophon would judge by the writing that lies within this casket, whether the man is worthy of much blame who strove, time after time, to fulfil what his vow required of him. And further, my master would fain know if King Bellerophon is now ready to accept what was proffered to him yestermorn, and if, in receiving that gift, he is willing to put away from him certain unpleasant memories of the past year."

When Bellerophon opened the casket he found the letter which Prœtus had written to the Lycian monarch:

"Time was when I saved your life from the lions, Jobates, and in your gratitude you then gave me two gifts. For the first—the hand of your daughter Sthenobœa—I feel less thankful now than I did in those days; perchance your second boon will give me more satisfaction. That second gift, as you may well remember, was a solemn oath to do at any time whatsoever service I might ask of you. The time has at length come for the fulfilment of that promise, and I now require you to do my bidding. The man who bears you this casket, Bellerophon of Corinth, was once dear to my heart, but he has this day proved himself so base that it is needful he should die; and since, after our great friendship, I cannot suffer him to be slain in mine own country, I command

you to put him forthwith to death in Lycia. What you must needs do, I warn you to do quickly, for it were grievous that, like me, you should grow to love the man whom yet you must slay. Whether he die by your foeman's sword in battle, or in time of peace at the hands of your own folk, I care not. Your vow paid, I pray that you may meet with greater happiness than has fallen to my lot. Fare you well!"

"Say to your master," commanded Bellerophon, when he had read the letter, "that I think no ill of him who strove to keep his vow. He acted treacherously, methinks, only because he deemed himself bound to perform his friend's bidding. All is forgiven, you shall tell the King, and I pray that he will straightway deliver into my keeping the precious gift which yesterday he promised me."

The slave hastened back with his message, and ere long a strain of glad music rang through the hall, and Jobates, his face at last joyous and unclouded, appeared leading towards Bellerophon the promised gift — the Princess Philonoë, a vision of perfect loveliness in her bridal attire. And so in Lycia, far from his native land, Bellerophon found his destined kingdom, where henceforth he dwelt in great amity with Jobates, adored of the people, and more than repaid for all the wrong he endured at the hands of Sthenobœa, by the deep and enduring love of her gentle sister Philonoë.

The Proud King

IN a far distant country there once lived a King who was surpassingly rich and powerful. From his earliest manhood he had always gained what he wished: first a beautiful wife, then, abundance of riches and a vast kingdom, to which he added many other lands by conquest. But his good fortune did not make life happier for those around him. Every year of prosperity left him more self-satisfied, till in time his vanity became intolerable. Even the most accomplished flatterers lived in fear of offending his pride. No one, said he, was worthy to sit at meat with him; it was death to a courtier to address him without his leave.

Now, one summer morning this king awoke early, and, to amuse himself, he began to count up all the riches that were his and the great deeds that he had done.

"What a record is mine!" he cried exultantly. "I have made my kingdom ten times the size of my father's. The plot of land where the first king of the country built his town and palace only suffices to-day for our royal kennels! Well may men bow down before me, for surely I am too great a king to be swept away by death. If I have risen so high above the common lot, why should I not rise still higher, and enjoy an unending

life on earth? For aught I know, that may be my destiny!"

With these vain thoughts King Jovinian soothed himself to sleep, and did not waken again till the sun was high in the heavens. A glance at the bright sunshine that played upon the fresh green leaves outside his window reminded him that it was a morning for the chase. His huntsmen were summoned when their master was ready, the hounds bayed eagerly on the leash, and the party swept merrily from the courtyard.

Deep into the forest they galloped, their red coats scattering amongst the trees; there the king, whose horse was the swiftest in the land, soon outdistanced the others, and was lost to their sight in the glades that stretched far before them. For many hours Jovinian rode on in hot pursuit of the stag till, breaking through the edge of the forest, he found himself on a grassy river-side shaded by trees. Heated with his long ride, he thought nothing could be more delightful than a swim in the stream, so, tying his hunter's reins to a tree, he threw off his costly dress, and plunged into the cool depths.

The clear, flowing water proved even more refreshing than he had expected, and it was long before the King swam leisurely to the bank. When he came to look for his robes, great was his surprise, and still greater his indignation, to find that clothes and horse alike had disappeared. Had some thief run away with them? Woe betide the villain when he was caught! Cooled by his dip in the river, the King grew hot again—this time with anger. But though it was meet that his Majesty should vow vengeance on the culprit, it was less fitting that he should stand there, naked, on the bank. He raised his voice, and called loudly on his courtiers. Alas!

no answer came, cry as he might. A finch or two, startled by his shouts, rose on the wing, but fluttered carelessly back to their leafy perch when they saw the harmless nature of the alarm. For the first time in his life Jovinian found no one to attend to his wants. What should he do, he wondered. Not far from the riverside he would find a snug manor-house, built lately by his orders for the chief ranger of the forest, who, loyal subject that he was, would be only too glad to offer his monarch clothing and refreshments, the best he had to give. Knowing the road to this house, the King hurried forward. A most distressing walk it was, for the hot rays of the sun beat on Jovinian's unprotected skin, and oh! how hard it was to trudge afoot when but an hour ago he had been astride the finest horse in the kingdom. The thought, however, of the kind entertainment he would receive from his ranger was some comfort to the unhappy king.

"Courage!" he murmured to himself. "Before long you will be sitting at ease in a cool chamber, dressed (thank Heaven!), in dainty summer robes, and sipping a draught to banish the memory of this miserable afternoon."

But what of the huntsmen in the meantime? While they roamed through the forest they met a horseman who, riding Jovinian's hunter and wearing the King's dress, resembled their absent lord so precisely that all saluted him as king, and, without any misgivings, rode back with him to the palace at nightfall. In hall and council-room the stranger played the part of Jovinian, and not even the Queen herself guessed that it was no longer the true king who sat on the throne.

All went well, then, with those who returned to court, but fortune did not favour poor Jovinian in his forlorn

state. When he came to the ranger's house he blew, as was the custom of those days, on the horn hanging by the doorway. The porter looked out from behind the grating, and seeing a man stand, the horn at his lips, without even a cloak about him, he rubbed his eyes to make sure he was not dreaming.

"How now?" he shouted gruffly. "What tempts you to go bugling without livery? We don't buy skins in warm summer weather; no need to show us yours! Home with you, and find something to put on!"

"Fool!" cried the King, furiously angry, "throw open the gate this instant. It is Jovinian, your king, who stands here. Let the master of the manor know that his liege lord has come desiring clothes, food, and rest. Make haste, fellow, if you wish to find pardon for your rash insults."

The porter roared with laughter. "Sure, this is all a dream! Now, don't you see this solid gate melting into thin air? Step through, my man!" Then with another mocking laugh he disappeared; and the King, left to himself, beat madly against the door. Just as suddenly as he had vanished, back came the porter, and unfastened the heavy bolts.

"Enough of that noise," he said. "I will give you your heart's desire, and lead you before my master. On my solemn word, he will make you sorry you ever asked to see him. And if I am blamed for bringing you in, I will make you sorrier. Quick march!"

The sun was streaming through the western windows of the hall where the ranger sat in his oak chair, a glass of wine at his side, enjoying a quiet hour at the end of his long day's work. With pride and pleasure his eyes turned from the rich carvings of hunting scenes along

his walls to the trim gardens that lay around the house. A squire at court, without lands of his own, he had been rewarded for years of faithful service by a gift of house and grounds when, twelve months ago, the King had appointed him to the charge of the royal parks and forests. Many a visit had Jovinian paid since then to his trusty retainer in his new manor.

This afternoon the ranger's pleasant reveries were to be interrupted. The sound of rude laughter in the courtyard floated up through the open windows, and at the same time a servant entered the hall to tell his master, with a scarcely suppressed smile, of the strange, unclothed visitor who stood waiting admission.

"The fellow calls himself our king—though beyond the trimming of his beard there is no likeness whatever. He clamours for a hearing, sir. Will you have him brought before you?"

"Aye, bring him in," said the ranger; "we must see that he is not acting the madman for some evil purpose. I'm sure I wish he had chosen any other hour than this to break in upon us. Well, well, where's your man?"

Speechless with anger, Jovinian had followed the porter from the lodge. He had run the gauntlet in the courtyard, where the serving-men had jeered at his appearance; but at last, thought he, as he came before the ranger, wrongs would be righted, and his retainer's household would once more pay him every honour when their master recognised his sovereign.

"You are surprised to see your king stand before you without his royal robes," he began, "but I shall soon explain by what accident this has come about, if you will first be good enough, Hugh, to give me the cloak that lies beside you. You, of course, can recognise

royalty though it is stripped of its trappings, but unfortunately, your servants have failed to do so. What! Do you mean to say you don't know me?" Here the King stopped short, for he found the ranger looking at him not with reverence, but with pity.

The master of the manor turned to one of his servingmen. "The poor creature is mad," he said quietly. "Take him away; give him food, clothing, and a night's shelter, and, above all, see that he is treated kindly. We can do little else for him. But, thank God, the sick in mind sometimes recover."

When Jovinian saw that the ranger would not believe he was anything but a commoner, and that he thought him quite crazy, he fell into a fierce passion. Bitterly he cursed his late favourite, calling him a hateful traitor and an ungrateful wretch; then in his fury he shook off those who would have held him back, and madly rushed from the hall, out of the gates, and on to the highway again.

His sudden flight made the ranger the more certain that he was a madman. "When next I see King Jovinian," said he, "I must tell him of this poor, moonstruck pretender. But hearken, my men, let us try now if the harp will not banish the memory of that unhappy wanderer. 'Tis churlish to sit moping in this paradise which my good lord has made over to me. Call me my minstrel anon."

Out on the quiet country road Jovinian ran blindly forward, knowing not, nor caring, where he turned, until, in the deepening shadows of evening, he sank down, spent in mind and body, on the grassy borders of the highway. The twilight softly changed to the blue stillness of a summer night, and still the King lay half

senseless. Hours might have passed—he took no measure of time now—when far down the road he saw a twinkling light gleam through the darkness. Nearer and clearer it grew, until it resolved itself into a forest of torches that flickered round the litter of some nobleman. Besides the torchbearers, men-at-arms were also in attendance; and Jovinian sprang to his feet as he saw that their livery bore the badge of one of his most intimate counsellors, old Duke Peter.

Maddened by all that he had undergone that day, and suspicious that his courtiers had plotted his downfall, he determined to challenge his old friend.

"Ha! my lord Duke," he shouted, high above the din of trampling feet, "go you to-night to join my enemies? The world, it seems, has turned against your master, and you, you wily old fox, will begin doubling too. You were ever a scheming rascal!"

A man-at-arms stepped forward, and gave him a light tap with his sheathed sword. "Say that again to the Duke's face! You will find it no cheap game to rail at his lordship."

The litter was drawn up in the middle of the road. Beneath the flare of torches Jovinian saw the haughty, keen-eyed, thin-lipped face of his courtier, who yesterday had smiled obsequiously at the crowned monarch and to-night was gazing stonily at the pariah.

"My man, your words are wild. If you have met with injury from me or any of my people come up to me in daylight and I will hear your grievance then. Trouble, methinks, has bereft you of your senses."

The calm, indifferent tone in which Duke Peter addressed him was a further aggravation to the forlorn king. "Look! Look!" he cried. "Do you not see that

I am Jovinian, your master, to whose favour you owe the very gems that sparkle on your fingers ? "

" A madman's ravings ! Be thankful, my poor friend, that your folly has not led you to tell your fancies at the King's throne. You would meet with scant consideration there. This silver piece will buy you food and clothing on the morrow. Take it, and follow my advice : keep beyond reach of his Majesty's officers. They are bound to mete out the sorest penalties to one who trifles with that august name. Forward, my men."

Before he knew what had happened, Jovinian was left alone on the highway, holding in his feeble grasp the coin that Duke Peter had pressed upon him—a coin stamped with his own image, sceptred, crowned, and in his royal robes, his jewelled feet resting upon a globe, as if to show how high he stood above the rest of the world.

The lights of the Duke's retinue glimmered awhile down the road, and then were lost in the darkness. Jovinian followed slowly in the same direction—why, he could not have told. Each step grew feebler ; drowsiness stole over him, and he flung himself down in a grassy hollow to forget his misery in deep, dreamless sleep.

At dawn he awakened to very different thoughts, as well as in very different surroundings, from those of the preceding morning. His first feeling was one of wretchedness, but the bright sunshine, the freshness of the air, and the fragrance of opening flowers soon bred in him a new spirit of hope. He looked around, and saw that he was not far from the gates of his royal city. Already country folk were astir, bringing their goods to market, and as the doors were not yet thrown open, a number of waggons had gathered under the walls. By hiding now and then in the hedgerows to avoid the peasants hastening

along with baskets of fruit, butter, and eggs, he was able to steal up to the gates without being seen. At the crowded portals, however, it was impossible to escape notice. There was a loud outcry against a man coming undressed to such a public place. Yet the country folk, with all their roughness, were not unkind; many of them took note of Jovinian's evident distress, and judged rightly that his clothes had been lost in some untoward accident. An honest fellow called him to his waggon, gave him a bowl of milk, and bade him jump up and hide amongst the piles of cabbages and sweet flowers that he was taking to market.

"You are bound for the city, if I am not mistaken. Whoever you are, and whatever your business, you don't seem over-happy in Adam's garb. Come up beside me, and when you are under cover you can tell me your tale."

Jovinian settled himself beside the countryman, and, fearing that his claims to kingship would once more be scoffed at, he began a different tale.

"I am a merchant from distant parts. On my journey last night I met with thieves, who stripped me of purse and all that I had, and now I must seek my only friend in this town, a squire at the King's palace. He will be glad, I know, to lend me what I ask. Only set me down at the palace gates, and I will soon be in a position to pay you handsomely for this morning's kindness. Tell me your name, friend, and where you live."

"Christopher-a-Green is my name, and my cottage you see across those fields. It's that little bit of garden and orchard that give me the second half of my name and the whole of my living. Thank God, we have always food enough, and we've a roof above our heads—though we may not be able to keep it there much longer. My grand-

dad, you see, built the cottage, and now that it has come to need mending my bushes seem less inclined than ever to grow gold pieces."

"Wait," said the pretended merchant—"wait till I have seen my counting-house again, and I will show you I am more grateful than your bushes for all your attentions."

It was not long before the waggon stopped at the gates of the palace courtyard, and after waiting a minute or so, till the place happened to be clear of onlookers, Jovinian slipped from the cart, nodded farewell to the countryman, and ran unnoticed through the outer court. But troubles commenced again when he reached the inner gate. A serving-man caught sight of him: "Out! Out!" he shouted. "Get out of this courtyard!"

The King turned at his words. "Why, my good follow, you are too hasty. Do you not see it is your sovereign whom you have addressed? Speed you and bring me robes, and your foolish mistake you have just made shall not deprive you of a rich reward."

"Madman!" ejaculated the servant. "To call yourself his gracious Majesty! The sergeants of the guard must take you in hand." And he marched Jovinian to the guard-room.

Surely amongst his men-at-arms, thought the King, some one would have eyes to see his master. But no, not a man knew him in his hapless state. They stood around their captive in the guard-room, and the more he tried to persuade them, the more they ridiculed the idea that he was their lord. Despair had seized him when two sergeants entered the room.

"His Majesty orders us to bring before him the man who has so presumptuously used his most honoured name."

"'Tis my last chance," murmured Jovinian. "In my own hall I shall face the Queen and all my noblemen. If they will not acknowledge me I am for ever an outcast."

With beating heart he walked between his two guards, his hands bound and his head bent down. The moment he crossed the threshold of the audience-hall he raised his eyes to the throne where he had so often sat in judgment. Beneath it he saw the Queen in her accustomed seat, surrounded by ministers of state. But to these he paid no heed, for his whole attention was given to a figure on the throne. To his unutterable astonishment he found that his place had been taken by another man! Dressed in Jovinian's robes, crowned, and holding in his hand an ivory sceptre, sat a stranger to whom the court was paying full reverence. Undoubtedly he was the image of their master, yet to Jovinian's eye alone there was one marked difference—the face of the supplanter was strangely bright, and his brow shone with a heavenly calm. As the forlorn King stood in amazement and dismay before the throne the regal figure spoke in clear, stern tones.

"Is this the man who has mocked my majesty?"

Jovinian nerved himself to answer firmly. "I am the true king. Yesterday those lords paid me the homage which to-day they are rendering you. Yet though the whole world turn against me, though all hope of restoration perish, to the end of my desolated life I cling to at least my name. I am Jovinian the king."

"Nay," said the other; "that speech shows a fevered mind. Heavy is the penalty you deserve for your pretensions. But before your sentence is pronounced, the Queen and the lords present shall give their decision as

to which of us is king. List you, poor madman; and you, my gentlemen, declare your judgment."

The courtiers turned unhesitatingly towards the throne, bowed low, and together replied: "Hail, King Jovinian! Long live your Majesty!"

At the same time the Queen mounted the steps of the throne, and knelt to kiss the jewelled feet of the man to whom she softly made answer. "My lord, your loving wife knows well that you are Jovinian."

"You hear these answers," said the crowned stranger to the uncrowned king. "And now, by the laws of our country, we may well put you to death. No punishment, however, will be inflicted if you straightway own upon your knees that you are a base pretender, and when you cease to call yourself king, you shall be given a place among our servants."

The pallor on Jovinian's face was chased away by a sudden rush of colour that spread even to his brow.

"Nay, nay," he cried hastily. "I will meet death at your hands rather than yield to your rule. I was born to a station high above other men, and I scorn to humble myself."

The other sat and gazed at him thoughtfully for a time. His calm face lost something of its sternness, and pity showed itself more plainly when at length he broke silence. "It shall be as I have said. You will meet with no punishment at our hands, but you must change your vain ways of thinking, and learn to live a lowly, submissive, and right-minded life."

In an agony of despair the King glanced round the hall, searching for a sign of recognition from his courtiers, as he had sought it among his soldiers in the guard-room. A few paces within stood his chamberlain, the marshal,

and the grizzled captain of the guard, and many another well-known lord. But, like the Queen, who hung on every word and movement of the King's personator, they had turned away, indifferent as to the fate of the poor prisoner, and wholly engaged in attending on the occupant of the throne. Yes; and as the sergeants prepared to lead their charge from the hall, Jovinian's staghound, his faithful follower in the hunt, rose with an angry growl from beneath the steps, and would have hurled himself upon his old master had not the soldiers beat him back.

"A fair-weather friend like the others!" sighed the King. "Even my dog must fawn upon the pretender and show its teeth to its fallen lord!"

Dazed with his rebuff at the palace, Jovinian hardly noticed whither he was led. He passed down the familiar streets, which had seen him of old returning in triumph from victorious battle. Through his mind flashed a picture of these bygone scenes—the glittering lines of mail-clad warriors, the gay balconies crowded with welcoming faces, the square grey steeples from which rang out glad peals in honour of the hero of the hour, King Jovinian, proud, complacent, and invincible; to-day an abject outcast, friendless, homeless, and despised by the very beggars in the street. Oh! why had Fortune turned against her favourite?

Outside the city gates the sergeants halted. "Our orders were to bring you beyond the boundaries of the town, and there to set you free; nor must you be seen in the city until you have come to your right mind again."

Turned adrift in this way, Jovinian wandered on by himself as aimlessly as he had done the evening before. He had travelled some four or five miles, along quiet lanes

hedged with sweet-scented bushes, when he came to a rippling brook, and by its side a rude clay hut. At once he recognised the place, and saw that unconsciously he had turned his steps in a direction they had often taken when he was a young and diffident ruler. In those days he used to come for counsel and confession to the hermit who made this cottage his humble retreat; in after years, as his self-sufficiency and pride developed, his visits became less frequent, and of late they had entirely ceased.

"Will the hermit know who I am?" he wondered. Resolving to put it to the test, the King knocked at the door of his cottage.

"Hail! friend," said a kind voice within the doorway; "tell me what brings you here?"

"Father," replied Jovinian faintly, "look on me, and you will see one who has often visited you before. I am Jovinian, the king."

"Nay; I cannot listen to lying words, such as a madman would utter. My counsel is only for the humble-minded and penitent; no jester shall come beneath my roof." And so saying, the hermit closed the door.

Then suddenly a change came over the King. He fell upon his knees, and the tears poured down his cheeks, while he cried aloud:

"O God, that I should be abandoned by all men! Why am I punished thus? It is for my foolish pride that Heaven has brought me so low. In this hermit's cell I was wont to confess my faults in bygone times, and now what long years have passed since last I asked forgiveness here! It was but yesterday I thought that nothing—not even Death itself—could overthrow me. To-day I see my weakness and all my vanity. Heaven help me! how little I have in myself to be proud of!"

His grief prevented Jovinian from seeing that the hermit had stolen out to him as he was kneeling on the threshold. A soft touch on his shoulder made him start.

"My noble master, my loved son," said the old man, "how come you here—and why should you be in such distress?"

Joy, overpowering joy, took the place of grief in the King's heart, and his eyes shone with new gladness.

"Heaven has humbled me beause of my sinful pride. Stripped of my kingship, I can get neither wife, lords nor servants to own me. Even now, when I came to your hut, you yourself, Father, did not know me. But since you have come again to call me by my name, I take it as a sign of Heaven's pardon, and believe that I may yet be restored to my throne. Father, will you hear my confession, and absolve me?"

"Enter the cell, my son," answered the other; "your troubles are near an end. I will shrive you gladly, provide you with all that my hut affords, and set you on your way to regain your royal state."

The hermit did as he had said. He heard the King's confession, granted him absolution, and when his holy offices were discharged, he hastened to bring his royal guest the plain fare that he had at hand. His gentle counsel fell on attentive ears, and when at last he told the King that it was time he should retrace his steps to the palace, Jovinian rose comforted and strengthened to greater endurance.

"I shall seek my kingdom, dressed in your rough raiment, Father, and mounted on your ass. It shall be a token of the humility in which you have wrapped my soul." And with cheerful face the King rode off at eventide towards the town.

In passing the city gates he saw one of the warders, who stood by the entrance, sign to his fellow through the dusk, and heard him whisper: "The King! But no salute! He left orders that if he rode in disguise through the town to-night we should not do him reverence."

This chance whisper eased Jovinian's anxiety, and still more, did he rejoice as he made his way to the palace, to see many of his people glance respectfully at his monk-like figure. Though, like the warders, they refrained from a salute, it was clear that they had recognised their master. In the palace, however, there was no constraint laid upon the servants; each man he met bowed humbly before the King. The old order prevailed again; and never had his subjects' homage seemed so pleasing to Jovinian as this summer evening, after he had been deprived of their respect for more than a whole day.

A squire came up to deliver a message that the Queen was awaiting her lord, as he had requested, in the Little Hall.

"Heaven aids me in my return," said the King to himself; "and if it is God's will, the stranger who wore my crown this morning will also acknowledge my rights, and yield me the throne."

He entered the Little Hall; and there he found his queen fast asleep, her silk-threaded needle in her hand, and a piece of broidery fallen from her lap to the floor.

By her side stood he who had played the King's part that day. He appeared the perfect image of Jovinian in his royal dress, but just as the King was stepping forward to accost him sternly, a change passed over him, and he appeared no longer human. His face shone brightly; white robes, rich with embroidered wreaths of flowers,

fell down to his feet, and from his shoulders sprang two wings of lovely and varying hues.

"Shrink not before me," were the words the King heard. "Often ere now have I hovered by thy side, though thou knewest it not. Thy place I have taken for a day, that thou mightest learn how feeble is thy power, how small a thing the sovereignty thou boastedst. Thou hast seen now that in a moment God can lay low the proudest monarch upon earth. And yet thou thoughtest thyself too strong to be moved even by death!

"Thy lesson is over; thank Heaven that a few hours' distress has taught thee wisdom for the rest of thy happy reign. Save the holy hermit, no one knows of thy punishment, but all will see thy new gentleness in future, and will bless thy changed nature."

The great outspread wings trembled for an instant before Jovinian's dazed eyes, then with a parting gleam of rainbow colours they bore away the guardian angel.

The King stood still, musing over the strange events of the two last days, until the Queen, awakening from her deep sleep, rose with a smile to greet him, and inquire if he would not throw off his disguise and meet his lords at the banquet. And so it came about that at the close of day Jovinian found himself clothed once again in his royal dress and throned amongst his nobles. He had no need to dread the gossip of the court about the "mad creature" who that morning had declared himself king: the matter was so trifling that it was already forgotten. None of his suite could have believed that they had not had their master in their midst since they returned from the hunt, and save perhaps that he was gentler in manner there was nothing outwardly to mark a difference in the King. Yet to Jovinian himself it seemed that he was another man

" Thy place have I taken for a day "

from the haughty ruler of two days ago, so fervently he now hated the pride which he had then harboured in his heart.

For many long years he lived to make his kingdom a pleasanter home for his people; and, that the country might not suffer again from a sovereign's arrogance, shortly before he came to die he called a clerk to take down in writing the story of his punishment to serve as a warning to future kings.

"The good hermit who alone knew of what befell me that summer's day has long been dead, and the secret of my repentance will die with me unless it is now heard from my lips. Then take up your pen, my scribe, and write me the tale of the misery through which I learned the grace of true humility."

The Story of Acontius and Cydippe

IT was on a spring-tide long, long years ago that there happened in the island of Delos what still happens any day of the year, and in any corner of the earth, —a young man fell in love with a maid.

The man, Acontius by name, was on a voyage through the Greek seas when he and his companions, casting anchor in a pleasant bay, came ashore, and sat down to enjoy themselves beneath the budding white-thorns of a little grove close to the main town. There, while he was idly singing of love and spring-time, Acontius caught a first glimpse of the young girl to whom he soon gave his whole heart. She flitted past him in the midst of a band of maidens who were on their way to the temple of Diana; but hers was the only face that he noticed, so little did any other interest him in comparison with her sweetness. From that morning his thoughts were all centred upon her, and the happiest moments that he knew were when he met her, knee-deep amongst the tulips of the garden where she wandered at sunrise, or walking at noon with her girl friends towards the house of the old priestess who instructed them in the service of Diana. Sometimes he fancied that she felt his love; at other times he was tormented by the thought that he might never be able to win her heart.

Day after day passed, and while his footsteps always turned to the town where he might see the maid, his comrades found little, for their part, to bind them to the island, and therefore determined to set sail ere long. Acontius, however, could not bear the thought of leaving Delos. Afraid to confide the story of his love-sickness to his rollicking shipmates, he stole away from them without a word of explanation, and found refuge in a little white cottage low amongst the rocks by the seaside. There a kindly fisherman housed him quietly until his friends, despairing of his reappearance, sailed away without him. Although he did not speak of the subject he had most at heart, the old fisherman with whom he lived guessed why he was lingering on the island, and thought it well one evening to warn his guest of the fate that threatened the very girl whom he wished to marry.

"Cydippe"—it was the first time Acontius had heard her name, and the sound of it thrilled his heart—"Cydippe has great need to find a lover this summer-time," said the fisherman as unconcernedly as though he had no idea that his hearer was interested in the gossip of the place. "When August comes round her mother purposes to bind the maid to serve in Diana's temple, and remain unwed all her days. She will have to vow that she will never marry, and to my mind it is a pity that the pretty young thing should not make some man happy by becoming his bride."

These careless words about Cydippe were as a death-knell to all the hopes that Acontius had been nursing in his breast. He asked himself wildly what he could do to win the maiden, but, alas! he could find no answer to his questionings. Even when he dreamed one day

that the Queen of Love came and smiled upon him it brought him little comfort, for he judged it ill-omened that she should appear beside him empty-handed and without a word of advice or consolation to a troubled lover such as he was.

Slowly the weeks of summer went past until August arrived, and the day broke when Cydippe was to vow lifelong service to Diana as her unwed priestess. Acontius had determined that he would not remain another day upon the island after his beloved made her vows to the goddess. He gave the honest fisherman a good sum of gold in return for his hospitality, and bade him farewell, the evening before the eventful day, in a cheerless voice that betrayed his misery and broken-heartedness. At daybreak he arose, red-eyed and melancholy, reproaching himself wearily because that, with all his brooding, he had been unable to find any way of preventing Cydippe from entering the service of Diana. As the dedication of the young girl at the temple was not to take place until midday, he had still some hours to pass before he should walk into town; for, heart-breaking though the sight would be, he was resolved to attend the ceremony, and watch his beloved seal her fate. In the sunshine of the early morning he flung himself down beneath an apple-tree whose fruit hung heavy upon its boughs, while here and there upon the grass a rosy apple lay smiling upward at its fellows as if it were well pleased it had dropped from the parent branch before them. In this shady nook poor, heavy-hearted Acontius fell asleep, to dream that the Queen of Love was approaching him, with Cydippe, shy and beautiful, by her side. Alas! as he awoke the thought of his coming loss swept over him, and filled him with despair. He lay open-eyed, grieving for

Cydippe, and as his mind dwelt upon her, he laid his hand upon a large, smooth-skinned apple that gleamed in the green grass beside him, and with a sharp thorn he idly traced in Greek letters upon one side of the fruit the words which he would dearly have liked to hear from his sweetheart's lips: *Acontius will I wed to-day.* Ah! the Queen of Love had in truth come to the rescue when she prompted him to trace these few words upon the apple and store it beneath his cloak!

Midday came round, and Acontius was at the temple of Diana, pressing close to the steps where Cydippe would presently mount to the altar. A great crowd had gathered to hear the vows which the maiden was to make in public; rich sacrifices had been offered, and songs had been sung in praise of the goddess. A blare of trumpets sounded the approach of the band of maidens who walked in front of Cydippe and her mother, the chief figures in the solemnities of the day. The girl came forward, pale, and very mournful. It was clear that her vow to remain for life an unwed priestess of Diana was to be taken not of her own choice, but solely to content her stern and haughty mother, who was bent upon winning honour by making Cydippe one of the foremost priestesses in the land.

Acontius held his breath as mother and daughter drew near. The Queen of Love, when she moved him to write upon her sacred fruit, had inspired him with a hope that he might yet alter the maiden's lot. There was but one moment in which to make his attempt. Cydippe was mounting the steps slowly, her mother having drawn back into the throng of onlookers, and as she passed the spot where Acontius was standing, he seized his oppor-

tunity, drew out the apple which he bore beneath his cloak, and flung it into the folds of the maiden's gown. Seeing at once who had cast the fruit she flushed deep-red, and clasped it in her hand. Did she who had breathed her inspiration into the mind of Acontius, complete her kindly aid by whispering to Cydippe the use to which she should put her lover's gift? Surely the Queen of Love directed her, for the young girl walked firmly up the remaining steps, and when she reached the altar she spoke never a word, but laid the apple down, and fixed her eyes prayerfully upon the cold statue of Diana, as though she would move the goddess to pity.

Her mother hastened up to her, surprised that she had not uttered her vows.

"Have you made your promises to the goddess, child?" she asked. "I did not hear you speak. And what is that you have laid upon the altar?"

Cydippe answered her so clearly that Acontius, standing a little distance below, heard her words.

"I have made no spoken vow, mother. I came here meaning, as you know, to pledge my days to Diana, although I would fain have chosen another lot. And now I declare before Heaven that the writing upon this apple shall be my solemn vow. I have neither written nor read the words, yet they shall make known my choice."

With trembling hands and a frown upon her proud face, the dame picked up the apple, and read her daughter's vow upon it: *Acontius will I wed to-day!* In great agitation she brushed past Cydippe to consult the priests about the extraordinary turn that matters had taken. Then a heated discussion arose, and some of the priests said that the maid should be free to fulfil the declaration written upon the apple, while the others insisted that it

was too late for her to turn away from the service of the goddess.

But all the time that the greybeards were wrangling, the bystanders, who had learnt of the strange happening, had likewise been talking it over, and they were all agreed that the lovers ought to be allowed to wed. To this unanimous opinion they gave voice so loudly that the priests, seeing that it could not well be disregarded, eventually gave their verdict to the same effect. The last person to yield her assent was Cydippe's mother, and even she was in the end content with the decision when she heard the cry of joyous rapture with which the two young people hastened from the temple of the stern Goddess Diana to fulfil the vow engraven upon the apple, the fruit that has always been sacred to the Queen of Love.'

Ogier the Dane

WHAT nobler vassal had good Charlemaine than Ogier, mightiest of the Danes, and most chivalrous of all knights? For many a generation after he had passed away, minstrels sang of his exploits: how, given as a hostage to the Frankish Emperor, in time he came to bear the Oriflamme against the paynims, fought hand-to-hand with Caraheu, and had slain base Charlot, had not Heaven bade him stay his hand. Denmark was his; he wore the crown of Britain; he stormed the great town of Babylon, waged war in Palestine for the Holy Cross, and ruled in Tyre.

The record of these deeds is a gallant tale, but more wondrous is the story Nicholas the Breton once related of Ogier. He spoke of how Morgan le Fay bore the hero to Avallon, when all his wars seemed ended, and of what came to pass thereafter.

Hearken, and judge of the marvel for yourselves.

The chill air that breathes just before daybreak crept in at the half-opened casements of a room where Death held sway. The fair young Queen of Denmark lay dead; around her head flickered the hallowed tapers that the watchers kept ever burning. The King, grieving sore for his dear wife, had knelt all night long by her bedside in

an agony of voiceless despair; while at the far end of the chamber, the nurses bent over the cradle of the new-born prince, from time to time whispering to one another memories of the grace and kindliness of their late mistress.

One of the women had crossed the floor on tiptoe to replace a taper that had burned low in its socket. Her hand was resting on the candle when a sudden tremor passed through her limbs, her eyelids drooped, and she lost all consciousness in a trance that was deep as the Queen's sleep of death. What befell the one nurse befell the others at the same moment. The King also came under the spell; his wan, drawn face relaxed, his eyes closed, and the desolate mourner forgot his woes for a little while in this strange, heavy sleep.

But now the deathlike stillness was broken by the sound of light footsteps on the staircase, muffled in the sweep of long silken robes. Noiselessly the door of the bed-chamber swung open, admitting a breath of sweet odour, more fragrant than the scent which was rising to the windows from rose and lily in the gardens below. In the doorway stood a group of fay ladies like a cluster of bright flowers in sunshine. Crowned they were, each with a circlet of gems, and their loose-flowing raiment shone with heavenly hues that seemed to light up the spot where they stood.

One by one they stepped daintily across the room to the infant's cradle, there to whisper over the little Prince of Denmark the promise of a fairy gift. The first to hail him was Gloriande, and the gift she bestowed was courage and steadfastness. "Thou shalt be a true knight," she whispered; "thine honour shall be stainless; and in upholding the right, thou shalt be alike fearless and unwearied."

The second fay advanced, a glorious vision of brightness, her head crowned with blood-red rubies, and a tunic of golden mail upon her breast. "War and strife I promise thee," she said sternly; "throughout thy long life, warfare unending, that so thou mayst win martial fame amongst men, and gain Heaven's blessing by conflict with the paynim."

These words were barely uttered when another of the group raised her voice, and smilingly took up the war-maiden's rede. "To that I add a little gift to sweeten thy labour. I give thee victory in every struggle. Whoso thy foe, thou shalt ever be conqueror."

The fourth followed with the gift of courtesy and gentle speech. Then came a grey-eyed fay, with parted lips and a rosy blush overspreading her cheek as she promised the Prince the love of fair women and the power of winning their hearts.

The last to glide to the boy's cradle was the most lovely of the band. She stood a while gazing down on him, then tenderly she whispered: "Ogier, the gift I give thee is mine own love. Not while thou art in the heat of strife, but at the close of thy warfare, thou shalt see me and rejoice in my gift. Till then, Ogier my love, farewell."

Then, softly as they had come, the fairy visitants stole from the palace to the shore, where the waves were breaking in silver ripples on the sand. A moment they paused in silence, their faces turned towards the west; a moment later and they had vanished, leaving the still slumbering palace unwitting of their visit to little Ogier's cradle.

Now as to Ogier's long and honourable life, we must pass it over, strange though that appear when Ogier himself is our hero!

He was, as the world knows, a generous knight, unsurpassed in valour, upright, and greatly beloved by his people. The heathen hordes dreaded to meet him in battle; the evil-doer shuddered beneath his glance. In warfare and in the ruling of his lands he was ever happy; but through the love he bore wife and child, grief no less than joy, fell to his lot. He early lost Bellisande, his sweet wife, and his only child, Baldwin, a winsome bright-eyed lad of great promise, was put to death by the evil-minded Charlot. But even these sorrows did not quench his spirit; bravely he toiled on to a ripe old age, and to the end of his days, Ogier was ever the same stout-hearted warrior.

In the cloudless western sky the sun is sinking softly below the horizon, but over in the east there is an angry look on heaven's face. Great masses of steel-grey cloud, stained red round the edges by the glow of sunset, are lowering above an ocean of tossing waves that change in colour from a glittering silver to green, grey, and sombre black. No wind ruffles the sea this evening, yet the billows, like a great army in rout, are tumbling and surging wildly as though they would dash down the barrier of bare brown rock which rises sharply in their path. This rugged island is the fatal Loadstone Rock, shunned in holy terror by every seaman. On winter nights, when snugly seated by the fireside, the old sailors may tell the strange rumours they have heard of the Rock, but he who nears it, will never return home to tell his own tale. The ship that tries to pass, is drawn to destruction against its magnetic cliffs, and the crew, if not sucked beneath the waters, die ere long of starvation upon its barren heights.

To-night there is a living man upon the Rock. The

sun sets upon the wreckage and bleached bones around him, and while the moon rises to throw her cold white light upon the scene, the lonely figure sits undismayed, awaiting sure death. He is an old man, nobly built; his hair is white, his face furrowed by age, but yet his kingly robes—now tarnished by the salt waves—are borne on shoulders quite erect, and his voice is still fresh and vigorous as he speaks his thoughts.

"For a man of my many years, my strength has stood me well. 'Tis seven weeks since our boat was cast on this rock, five days since the last of the crew died with our last crumb of bread between his lips, and still I am alive. If God had not willed me to die here, I had had strength enough to end my days, sword in hand, upon the field of battle. How glorious to have drawn my last breath beneath the banner that waved our challenge to the paynim foe!

"Thou must find thee another leader, Charlemaine, to take my place and drive back these heathen bands from the fair land of France, for never more shalt thou see me take the field. Ah, never didst thou guess that Ogier's bones would rest upon a lonely sea-girt rock! And yet this death, so different from what he hoped to meet, grieves not thine ancient knight now that he sees it close at hand." And Ogier knelt down to thank God in simple words for thus ordering his end.

As night darkened, he fell into a deep slumber, from which he awoke before dawn; but the darkness that still overhung land and sea was suddenly dispelled by an unlooked for light which broke upon his eyes ere he had been long awake, and which steadily increased in ruddy brightness, while at the same time his ears caught the sound of sweet music.

" Ogier knelt down to thank God "

"This is the dawning," he murmured, "not of an earthly day, but of eternity. Death steals upon me; how pleasant, how gentle its approach!"

Just then he fancied his name was whispered through the air. Taking it to be a summons, he rose and crossed the island towards the east, whence the voice seemed to have come, and from where the light was still streaming.

The music had ceased, and the rays were already growing somewhat dim, yet across the sea, as he raised his eyes eagerly to the east, he could descry a shining palace of gold in the midst of green lawns and shady groves of trees! But even as he gazed upon the scene, the light faded, the palace was lost in the darkness, and sea and sky became alike grey as the night around.

Imagining that the vision and the semblance of music had arisen from his own worldly thoughts, he sat down to turn his mind resolutely towards graver concerns; but the pulse of life beat stronger and stronger in his veins, and after trying for some time to centre his thoughts on approaching death, he gave up the effort, and started instead to climb down the rocky eastern side of his prison, whither he felt drawn in search of further revelations.

It was no easy task to swing himself from ledge to ledge, hanging, sometimes by one hand alone, above the sea which foamed far below. In time, however, he safely reached the base of the rock, where the only foothold was upon the wrecks, which the angry billows dashed ceaselessly to and fro against the fatal magnet cliffs. From one piece of floating timber to another, he leaped out towards the east, until he reached the outermost wreck, where, steadying himself against the rush of the sea and the blinding dash of spray, he stood with his good sword Courtain in his grasp, expectant only of death.

At that moment he heard again a strain of music floating through the air, and a bright speck of light appeared moving on the ocean towards him, rapidly growing in size until he saw it was a gilded boat. His first thought, that this was another wreck to be added to those already drawn to the Rock, was soon disproved, for although unguided by human hand, it steered its course unerringly through the troubled seas and drew up safely by the wreck where Ogier was standing. Believing that, whatever its course, it was intended to bear him from the island, he sheathed his sword Courtain, and stepped into the skiff. There was neither oar nor rudder in the little boat, but oarsman and helmsman were not wanted, for no sooner had the old knight seated himself amongst the cushions in the stern than the skiff shot lightly from the Rock ; and he, giving way to overpowering sleep, knew nothing more of his passage.

When he awoke it was to find the boat lying moored in a shaded nook at the edge of a quiet stretch of water. He sprang ashore and, half-alarmed by the rare beauty of the place, drew his sword and murmured a holy prayer; yet as he went forward a step or two, his fears that it might be an unhallowed spot vanished, and he fancied he had come to Paradise. The meadows bore a wealth of gay flowers, the air was soft and birds sang sweetly from blossom-laden trees. The loveliness of the scene, however, was presently dulled to his senses by a new feeling of feebleness. His limbs grew stiff, each step was taken with greater difficulty ; his eyes were dim and even his memory was failing, for he could not recall whence he had come, or aught of his past life. His growing weakness he took calmly. It was the hand of death upon him, he supposed, and he was well content to have it so, since he

was already in Paradise. Slowly he wandered down a green alley until he reached a wicket-gate opening on the fairest of gardens ; then, turning fainter, he staggered to a fountain over which two white-thorns shed their blossoms, while close by sounded the minstrelsy that he had heard faintly on the isle. Here he sank down unconscious, and all his thoughts melted to heavenly dreams. Through these dreams came the murmur of a sweet voice : " Ogier, Ogier, how long thou hast been in coming ! "

Fancying himself in heaven, he strove to answer as though he were addressed by his great Master.

" Nay, nay," said the voice, " not yet art thou in Paradise, Ogier. Long may it be ere thou goest on that last journey, now that thou hast reached me, mine own love ! Ah ! at length the happy day has come when I may give thee again the beauty and freshness of youth, and fit thee to enjoy the love thou didst gain from me even in thy cradle, long years ago."

Life seemed ebbing fast from him as he struggled to shake off the feeling of someone touching his forehead and calling him sweet names. Was it the shade of his young wife (her very name now lost to him) who, years past, had gone to her rest beneath the hawthorns of God's-acre in old St Omer ? Was this a troubled dream of things past that haunted him in the shadow of death ?

No, it was not so. Once again he swooned, but ere consciousness left him, he felt the soft pressure of a living hand and knew that a ring had been slipped upon his finger.

His eyes opened on the same scene—with what a difference ! No longer was his body weak or his mind frail as

an old man's. The strength of youth was within him; he was entering on a new life.

At the first glance he thought the garden unchanged, but, as he looked around him a second time, he saw that it now held in its midst a lady whose marvellous beauty enhanced ten times the charm of the scene. So young she seemed that he would have thought her a maiden in her teens, but that her glorious eyes were filled with the wisdom of more than a mortal lifetime. Her raiment matched her loveliness. The finest cloudy veilings fell to her sandals where jewels gleamed against her snowy feet; a ruby shone like a star upon her breast, and her golden locks were wreathed with sweetest rosebuds.

Ogier had sprung to his feet, and as she moved towards him, her eyes seeking his, and her arms outstretched in welcome, he faltered out a question as to where he stood, and in whose presence.

The fair one answered: "Thou hast come to Avallon to dwell with me, Morgan le Fay, whose love was pledged to thee whilst thou wast yet an infant in the Danish palace." She told of how she had visited his cradle with her sister fays those many years ago. "Yet am I young as then, for our youth is eternal; and now that thou art in Avallon, thou shalt be young and changeless too. See, I shall show thee the charm by which thou hast been restored to the strength of early manhood."

She pointed, as she spoke, to a heavy gold ring with curious figures traced upon it, which now encircled one of Ogier's fingers, and told how, when she had placed it there a little while ago, the marks of old age had straightway vanished from his form. "So long as thou wearest it," she said, "death will not touch thee."

At first, overcome by the fay's beauty, he had been en-

raptured with his new surroundings, but soon a great longing for his old life of warfare upon earth swept over him, and he felt that all before him was dreamlike, dreary and unreal. Morgan read his thoughts, and with a smile linked her hand in his, and drew him towards the castle beyond her gay gardens. "Come, love," she whispered, "our life is fairer than that earthly one for which thou mournest. Thou wilt be happy, aye, radiantly happy, when thou hast forgotten thy stormy past. Bethink thee how thou wouldst even now have been dead, had not I slipped the ring upon thy finger and so kept life within thee. Wilt thou not give me thy love in return for mine already given?"

Across the daisied grass they had passed to a doorway in the castle, round which clustered a group of fair maids singing joyous welcome to Ogier and strewing flowers upon the way. Through long, cool corridors they came at length to a throne placed at the end of a hall, and there, when Morgan had led the hero up the steps, a young girl advanced from the band, and laid at his feet a golden crown. This Morgan placed upon his head, bidding him, in gentle words, forget the world and rise to enjoy the new life in Avallon. At the magic touch of the Crown of Forgetfulness his last regrets vanished; the past was blotted out, and all he knew was that he had now a share in the joys of a wondrous glad and peaceful country. No trouble henceforth met him in Avallon, where base or mischief-making men were unknown; only the noble-hearted (whom men thought dead) were borne like Ogier from earthly seas to these pain-forgetting shores, where all was happiness and content.

A hundred years had passed since the aged Ogier had

last been seen upon earth. In those hundred years many a change had befallen the lands in which he had dwelt, and in France, unhappily, these changes had all been for the worse. A cruel, lingering war oppressed her sorely; the heathen foe once more overran the land, besieging cities and laying waste the fertile country.

At the gates of Paris, one spring day, stood crowds of anxious folk pressing round each horseman who rode up to the city walls, and questioning him eagerly of the progress of the foe. Was Harfleur still safe? Did Andelys stand in need of help? And was it true that the Pont de l'Arche had been burnt down? To these and such-like questions each new-comer gave a different answer, and the crowd turned from him impatiently to waylay the next traveller.

Towards sundown a party of three rode up to the gates. Two serving-men followed their master, their eyes fixed on him with doubt and awe, as though striving to determine in what way he differed from other men. He was apparently quite young, for though his face was bronzed, it was still fresh and unfurrowed; his bright golden hair and grey eyes were as a boy's, and the look on his face was radiant as an angel's. In height he far surpassed the men around him, his giant-like form rendering more conspicuous the old-fashioned dress and armour which he wore.

The warders examined his pass, and asked his name and from what city he came. The Ancient Knight, he replied, was the name people gave him in St Omer, the town he had just left. Then, heedless of the questions showered on him, as on all the other wayfarers, he stared pityingly at the sergeants before him.

"Saint Mary!" said he, "if that is all the stature ye

reach nowadays, 'tis no wonder the pagans are victorious! When the Hammer-bearer took the field, his men were of a different pattern!"

His words savoured so strangely of bygone times that the group around him ceased their talk, and gazed in wonder at the speaker. A mocking laugh broke the silence. "Charlemaine has risen from the tomb to save our city!" cried a voice in the crowd.

At the name of Charlemaine the horseman started in his saddle, knit his brow and seemed as though he would speak. No words, however, came to his lips, and gathering up the reins with a sigh he rode onwards to the city.

The Ancient Knight was none other than Ogier, and his return from Avallon was on this wise.

One day Morgan le Fay approached him, and told how France was suffering from the onset of fierce tribes whom none could drive back. Would he don his armour and champion the cause of that Christian country, she asked him, if, under a spell, he were borne back to the world which he had left a hundred years ago? So long as he wore the magic ring, he could not suffer death nor lose his youthfulness; and once the pagans were subdued, he would be wafted, as before, to Avallon, his fame immeasurably increased by this new exploit.

To Morgan's proposal Ogier gave willing assent. Beneath her potent spell he fell into a trance during which the mysterious voyage was accomplished, and he awakened to find himself on the Flemish coast; thence journeying to St Omer, the town he knew so well in the old days, he had ridden through the desolated country to join the forces that were mustering in Paris.

His antique dress and old-world talk had roused as

much wonder in the country roads as at the gates of Paris, though the simple peasants were less apt to mock at his appearance than were the quick-witted townsmen. But if the French folk thought it strange to see a man of his stamp in their midst, it was stranger for Ogier himself to visit old haunts peopled with a new generation. The memory of Avallon had grown dim, and all his thoughts were given to the world in which he moved again.

Now, the King of France lay besieged by the enemy at Rouen, in dire need of help from his capital. When Ogier entered Paris he learned that the Queen was holding a muster of troops in the square before her palace, and that many knights had gathered to swear fealty, and march, at her orders, to relieve Rouen. Accordingly he made his way to the palace, joined the crowd of soldiers, and awaited his turn to approach the Queen, who, beneath a royal canopy in the open square, was receiving the oaths of fealty from eager lips.

At length his turn came, and he knelt before a handsome woman, tall and dark-haired, whose eyes lit up with surprise and approval as she saw his striking carriage. His homage was paid in the courtly style of a past century. Then as he rose, the Queen inquired his name and from what country he had come. Once again he replied that men called him the Ancient Knight ; as to his home, it was so long since he had left it, to take up his abode in a far country, that he had no recollection of it whatever. That answer made the Queen the more curious to discover the mystery of this old-world young knight, but as there was then no leisure for talk, she bade a page conduct him to the palace, where he should have refreshment and await her coming. She wished, said she, to

appoint him to some command, and to give him his orders that same day.

So Ogier followed the page through a postern gate by which he had often entered the palace in Charlemaine's time. The coat-of-arms above the doorway, which he well remembered looking fresh and gay in those days, was now so faded and weather-stained that the young page paused to point it out to the stranger as a quaint and interesting relic of the past! No wonder Ogier felt as though he were in a dream, and would presently awaken to find himself among the familiar faces of his early days, or perchance alone on the fatal Loadstone Rock!

After a light meal in the hall, he wandered out of doors to the gardens, past merry groups of squires and gay ladies, until, finding a quiet spot beyond the sound of play and laughter, he lay down to rest, and soon lost himself in dreams.

Still slumbering, he was found by the Queen, who, having dispatched her affairs of state in the public square, came through the gardens, accompanied by an elderly dame of honour. Her eyes wandered admiringly over his outstretched form, and with a smile she remarked that the name given to him was ill-suited to such a handsome young knight.

"Ah, my lady," said the dame, shaking her head distrustfully, "I fear there is some dark mystery about him. The squire who took him to the palace says he kept questioning him of men who have been dead these fifty years or more. And look how old a fashion he shows in his armour! God grant he is not a spirit of evil come to lead us into greater trouble! That ring, engraven with strange figures, is doubtful sign of his good faith." And even as

the Queen was striving to reassure her, the old dame stooped down, and deftly slipped the ring off his finger.

Instantly his golden hair changed to white, his face grew wrinkled, and, amidst other marks of old age, his breathing became hard and gasping. His eyes half opened, but his lips were too feeble to frame words ; he could only move one hand slightly, as if groping for the lost ring.

The Queen grew pale with terror when she saw this change pass over the young and handsome knight. The tears coursed down her cheeks, for she could not endure to see him growing grey and cold, as if the hand of death were already on his heart. Her old attendant, on the contrary, showed neither dismay nor pity. She handed the ring to her mistress, saying that it was indeed a treasure, since the wearer of it would ever remain young. But the Queen would not keep it, tempting prize though it was. To the indignation of the cruel old dame, she knelt over the knight, and whispering, " Ah, wilt not thou think kindly of me if I restore thee this magic ring ? " she hastily thrust it upon his finger, in the hope that it might yet be in time to save his life.

As quickly as strength had ebbed, so fast did it flow back to Ogier. In a moment he sprang to his feet, fresh, youthful, and handsome as before, looking around him with dazed eyes, that showed he had newly awakened from dreams and did not understand the reason of the Queen's pallor and her troubled looks. She, hiding her anxiety, smiled, and chided him playfully for sleeping whilst other men were fighting for the cause of France.

" Nay, Queen," said he ; " I would far sooner meet thy foemen than be confronted with such dreams of old age and misery as have come to me in my sleep this afternoon."

With a sudden blush that made her look the lovelier in

Ogier's eyes, she cried: "Ah, if dreams beset such a mighty man as thou, then it is pardonable that they also visit a frail woman like me! 'Twas but last night I dreamed that enthroned before our people sat a king of France whose face was strange to me; to-day I know it to have been thine."

From the way in which the Queen spoke, Ogier saw that she thought him worthy of every honour, and he, in return, felt deeply grateful for her trust, and longed to prove that it was well placed in him.

Together they walked to the council-room, leaving behind them the dame of honour, who was muttering her disgust at the turn events had taken, and vowing that if ever she had the chance of regaining the ring, she would not again part with it so easily.

Ogier had not long to wait an opportunity of serving in the field. In the council-room he gave such wise advice, and showed so extraordinary a knowledge of warfare, that he was forthwith appointed to the command of one wing of the newly raised army, which was about to march from Paris to the aid of the King at Rouen.

A proud man was Ogier as he rode forth at the head of his troops next morning, his heart fired with the joy of coming battle and love of the fair Queen, who from her window, watched the passing army, and dropped a wreath of sweet-scented flowers at her champion's feet.

When the army reached Rouen it was met by the news that the King lay slain by an arrow, and that the town and surrounding country were in the hands of the heathen foe. It was not long before Ogier changed the fortunes of the war. He speedily fell upon the enemy, and completely routing them in a great battle, he avenged the King's

death and recaptured the city. Then, on his victorious return to Paris, he was welcomed as the saviour of France, and the people, who had now to elect a new monarch, declared, one and all, that the Ancient Knight must succeed to the throne, for he had proved himself be a leader amongst men. For a year he continued to wage war upon the heathen invaders, driving them before him until not one remained within the kingdom of France. So great was his delight in once more being on the field of battle, and so deep his devotion to the Queen, who, after a short widowhood, had now promised to bestow her hand upon him, that amid the pleasures of his new life, Avallon, with its peaceful, uneventful days, faded utterly from his memory.

In due course, when May was again gladdening the land, preparations were made for the coronation of King Charles (the name by which Ogier was known in his new kingdom), and for his marriage, on the same day, with the widowed Queen. Full of joyful thoughts he awoke in the early dawn of that great day. So early it was that the sparrows had scarce begun to twitter in the eaves, and at first the only sound that was heard in his bedchamber was the distant hammering of the woodwrights, who had been busy overnight completing the stagings for the morning's pageant.

Presently, however, a voice rang in his ears: "Ogier! Ogier!" Now, our hero had lost all memory, not only of Avallon, but also of his former days on earth when he was known as Ogier the Dane. The name was strange to him, therefore, and, rising on his elbow, he cried: "Who is here? Why seek ye an Ogier in this room?"

There came a sigh in answer to his questions. "Ogier was once a mighty knight," said the gentle voice, "and

many were his gallant deeds when Charlemaine ruled in this land." Then the astonished listener heard the story of his own wonderful prowess and the conquests he had once made. "The Ogier of whom I tell, is none other than thou who to-day callest thyself Charles of France; last year the Ancient Knight was thy title. Ah, Ogier, mine own love, hast thou forgotten that thou camest here only on a short sojourn from the happy land of Avallon? Return, I pray thee; the heathen are swept from France, and thy task is finished. If thou didst linger here, no more fame couldst thou win, and the unending youth that my ring provides for thee, would rouse ill talk amongst mortals. Come, love, take from me the crown which dispels all thought of earthly life, and which will once more bring thee perfect bliss. Dost thou still look on me strangely? Nay, Ogier, this is no empty dream."

By his side stood Morgan le Fay, dazzlingly beautiful, holding in her outstretched hand the crown that had been placed on his head when first he entered the palace of Avallon. At her bidding he now rose as in a dream, put on the kingly robes that had once been Charlemaine's, and seated himself in the royal chair, wearing the golden crown, and holding in his right hand the sceptre of that great conqueror. Then the fairy Morgan drew near, raised the earthly crown from his head, and set in its place her circlet, which brought its wearer the blessed boon of forgetfulness. In a moment the memory of the past months was blotted out; the hero recalled the fair land of Avallon, and knew that it was no creation of his fancy that stood before him, but his own true love, who had come to lead him to those distant shores.

"Oh, love," he faltered, "how came we here? Have I been separated from thee for a while? I dreamed, me-

thinks, of having spent long months toiling and battling upon earth."

Without waiting to answer, she took his hand in hers and drew him gently from the palace. On the threshold they paused, and turned their eyes upon the sleeping city, whose Queen would yet have to seek a new consort to share her throne. Beneath the rising sun the Seine shone like a great stream of molten gold, and very fair lay the misty town along its banks. A moment the pair stood drinking in their last memory of this world — then vanished, and mortals knew Ogier no more. But in far-distant Avallon, he and his fairy bride dwell together in bliss, untouched by age or by the shadow of death.

The Golden Apples

A MERCHANT ship of Tyre was on the point of starting upon its homeward passage from a Grecian shore. The sails were set and the anchor was being hoisted when a loud shout was heard from the cliffs. Across the sands two men came hastening towards the ship, one of them huge-limbed and strong as any giant, clothed in a lion's skin, and carrying a great club banded with steel; the other old and grey-haired, panting with the exertion of keeping pace with his stout young comrade. His fluttering blue gown looked a signal of distress as he feebly pressed forward, leaning upon a long staff. The Tyrians saw him point out their boat to his companion, who raised his voice again, and hailed them cheerily:

"Good sirs, we hear that ye are setting out for Tyre and countries that are hotter than ours. Fate has it that I am to meet my death by fire, so I would fain begin now to try how I stand heat!" He stopped to laugh heartily at his jesting words, and then went on more seriously to ask if they two might journey with the Tyrians.

The master of the boat was not unwilling to take them on board, provided they could show themselves honest men, and able to pay him a fair sum for passage-money.

"Take this as a guarantee of our good faith," cried the

giantlike man; and he flung on to the deck an enormous gold armlet that shattered to atoms a water-jar upon which it chanced to fall. The sharp-eyed Tyrian was well pleased with the mass of gold that lay at his feet, and when the grey-haired stranger on the beach held up two great pearls, and promised to hand them to him so soon as the merchants took himself and his friend on board, the agreement was made without further delay. Then the strong man caught up the elder in his arms, and strode through the water to the side of the ship, where, seizing the end of a rope that was thrown out to him, he swung himself and his living burden lightly upon deck.

The seamen crowded around the strangers, and would have asked many questions, but they were awed by the manner in which the great-limbed younger one met their advances. They could not even learn the names of the two new-comers. The Shepherd of the Shore was the only title the elder would give himself; and as for the younger, he laughingly told the Tyrians that they might call him the Strong Man.

The voyage seemed prosperous. The wind favoured their course towards Tyre, and while the sailors delighted in the genial company of the Strong Man, his little old friend gave them tenfold more enjoyment by telling them wonderful stories of the deep, and describing the life of the strange sea-folk who live beneath the waves. Sometimes his listeners were ready to believe that he had himself seen these green watery depths, so vividly did he picture the quiet, sunless pools where tree-like sea-weed overspreads the white bones of lost sailors, and where mermaids play with frolicsome little sea-monsters.

One morning the party awoke to see the coast of Phœnicia lying before them; but ere they could touch

land the fair weather gave place to a cold, rainy day, and the wind veered round to the east. In a tempest of driving rain and wind the ship was swept westward, on and on, until the Tyrians believed that they would soon reach the edge of the world, where the circling ocean stream would bear them round and round the earth through all time and eternity, since surely death itself could not befall them with these two godlike strangers sharing their lot. Yet their fears were vain. Calm and sunshine followed the terrible storm, and their ship sailed smoothly forward, though her course was still, perforce, towards the west. At length a new land appeared above the waves—a strange land of mountains fringed by a strip of rich, flowering meadows and leafy orchards. As the seafarers drew near, they saw, half hidden behind a thicket of rose-trees, a long and immensely high wall of brass, on which the Strong Man fixed his eyes eagerly. The Tyrians guessed now that their course had not been purposeless. The gods had driven them to these shores in order that this man should reach a place unknown to mortals, but of which, nevertheless, he had come in search.

No sooner was the gangway thrust out than the strange pair stepped ashore, the younger with a shout of good cheer, the elder slowly and unwillingly. Then two of the crew, more adventurous than their fellows, determined to follow the strangers secretly, and see the matter out.

Treading upon a carpet of most gorgeous flowers, such as no other country could show, the men walked up to the brazen wall, on which were pictured histories of things long past and also events yet to come. At a great iron-bound door the Strong Man halted, and, raising his club, he shattered the bolts with a few blows. The Tyrians,

following at a safe distance behind, saw him step over the threshold of the ruined door into a wonderful garden beyond. His old comrade, curiously enough, had disappeared. When last they noticed him he had been leaning idly against a tree-trunk whilst his comrade showered his blows upon the door, but when next they looked in his direction they saw nothing more than a lithe green lizard slipping through the dry leaves at the stump of the tree. For the time, however, they thought nothing of the elder man, for their whole attention was given to the younger. He marched down a long grass path in the garden, brushing aside the lilies at his feet and the drooping branches of blossom about his shoulders. Presently the sound of sweet girlish voices was carried across the beds of flowers, and the Strong Man stayed his steps when he came in sight of a marble fountain overhung by a tree, which bore on a bough above the water three golden apples. Around the tree stood three lovely maidens, and, as if to guard these guardians of the fruit, a huge black serpent wound its coils about the maidens' feet and the smooth stem of the apple-tree, and reared its crest threateningly above the golden-haired sisters.

The Strong Man spoke to the three maidens frankly and yet gently. He told them that he had come to pick the golden apples from their bough, and when they each in turn prayed him to forbear from such an attempt, he answered that he was ready to face the serpent and had no fear of its venomous fangs. The sisters, having warned him to no purpose, had then to do their appointed duty in guarding the fruit from this bold adventurer. They let the serpent uncoil, and watched it dart with a hideous hiss towards the invader of their peaceful garden. It wreathed itself round his limbs; but he, strong and

The Garden of the Hesperides 154

confident, grappled with it furiously, strangled the life out of its writhing neck, and flung it to the ground a limp, lifeless mass, the dark blood oozing from beneath its bruised and battered scales.

The maidens had neither praise nor blame to give the hero. No doubt they admired his prowess, but it was not theirs to speak to him who had won the fruit of their garden. They silently marked him pull down the bough and pluck the three golden apples. They listened in silence when he begged them to keep his girdle in token of his visit, and unmoved they watched him turn, with the fruit wrapped in his lion's skin, and leave the place.

The Tyrian sailors, who had been unseen witnesses of the struggle, now hurried out of the garden before the Strong Man. His friend, the Shepherd of the Shore, as he had called himself, was nowhere to be seen. On the spot where he had last been noticed, a little blind mole was wandering up and down restlessly; but you may be sure the seamen had no eyes for such a common creature when their minds were so full of the scene from which they were hastening. Hardly had they reached the ship, and exclaimed to their countrymen that they had certainly no other than a god in their company, when the Strong Man made his appearance unconcernedly, accompanied as before by the elder stranger; and the Tyrians, for all that they thirsted to learn of his exploit, dared not put a single question to this open-faced but curiously secretive hero. They raised their anchor, since there was nothing to keep them longer on this lonely shore, and the ship now sped eastward without difficulty. The Strong Man was light-hearted as ever, laughing and jesting with the crew as though his life had been all play to him. His comrade resumed his former habit of telling many a

strange story of other times and places, and now that the visit to that far-off island had been accomplished, the men noticed that his face was no longer drawn and haggard ; like the Strong Man, he too had something more than mortal in his appearance.

" Come," he said to the Tyrians one evening, as they flocked around him to beg for another of his wonderful tales. " To-night I will tell you a marvel that is of your own age.

" Asian though ye are, ye have surely heard of great Hercules and his brave deeds in all parts of the earth no less than in his own land of Greece. Well, it is but a month ago that King Eurystheus of Mycenæ, who lords it over Hercules, ordered him to fetch from the garden of the Hesperides the three golden apples which have hung there for countless ages watched by the daughters of Hesperus. But how was Hercules to find his way to a land which no mortal had ever reached ? The hero turned grave as he thought over the difficulties of the quest. All night he walked the seashore, and at grey dawn he came to a bay where, the tide having ebbed its farthest, a great stretch of shining wet sand lay before him. Strewn upon the sands he saw strange shapes that were but the ocean's counterparts of what ye know upon the dry land—sea lions, horses, and cows, mermaids and mermen, and in the midst of all lay the sea-god Nereus. While this host of Nereus' folk and beasts were sleeping, Hercules crept up to the sea-god, and woke him with a shout : ' Nereus, thou who knowest everything in heaven and earth and beneath the waves, arise and lead me to the Hesperides, or I will wrestle with thee till I wring out thy consent by main force.'

" The hero's loud voice roused every sleeper. The

men and maids darted beneath the billows, and the green-haired beasts plunged into their homes with a dull roar that echoed through the distant caves. At first Nereus would not hearken to the bold request made of him. Then Hercules leaped upon him, and on the lonely sand sea-god and mighty hero wrestled their fiercest. The old man of the seas was no match in strength for his young opponent, so where force was wanting he tried to win by tricks. First he changed himself into a leopard, hoping that Hercules would drop that armful in dismay. But his burly foe was not so easily discouraged. Then he turned into a big brown bear, and hugged the man till he himself was tired, and was glad to take the form of a tiny bird that was almost too small for Hercules' large fingers to close upon. What other shapes did he put on? A slimy eel, a snake with glittering golden eyes, and even a fly which, for all its quickness and tiny size, could not escape Hercules. Fire and water alike Nereus changed himself into, and when these too failed to baffle the hero, the sea-god gave up the struggle, and, taking his natural shape of a small grey-haired man (whom ye, Tyrians, have seen day after day in your midst!), he gave Hercules the boon that he required, and led him to the beach, where your boat, bound for the port of Tyre, was, by the will of the gods, made to bear Hercules, as ye yourselves know, to the island of the Hesperides.

"And now ye have heard my story. Your ship may be the worse of this long voyage; your kinsfolk may just now be sad at heart, thinking that ye are lost; but I promise you that ye shall have no cause to mourn this journey if, on landing, ye build a temple to Nereus, the sea-god, and do honour to him whom ye have borne in your ship these many days. From this time henceforth

look to me for help whensoever ye find yourselves in troubled waters."

Hardly had the Tyrians, open-mouthed and breathless with astonishment, heard the end of his speech than the old man faded from their sight. At the garden of the Hesperides two of them had thought little of the lizard and the mole which had appeared when the old man vanished, but now, when a sea-gull fluttered past them from the spot where Nereus had sat in their midst, they knew that the god had chosen once more, and for the last time, to change his shape in their presence. The men turned to Hercules (the Strong Man, as they had well named him), and would have done reverence to him, but he laughingly refused their worship. "Give sacrifice to Nereus, who brought us upon our way when no mortal could have guided us to the land of the Hesperides; but for myself, I wish no honour paid me; rather would I live as a simple man revelling in the sunshine of heaven and the joy of human life."

The Lovers of Gudrun

NINE hundred years ago, on the western shore of Iceland, stood the great steading of Herdholt, where dwelt Olaf the Peacock, a man beloved by his people and held in high honour by all around.

Thorgerd was his wife, and there had been born to them five stalwart sons and two daughters. Bodli, the son of Thorleik, Olaf's brother, had been reared amongst them, and between him and Kiartan, the eldest son of Olaf, there had ever been a close friendship, so that they were dearer to each other than brothers.

Olaf's friend and neighbour, Oswif, lived at Bathstead, seven miles from Herdholt ; he too was the father of five sons, but the pride of his house was his daughter Gudrun, a maiden of wondrous beauty, just fifteen years old at the time our story begins.

One day, when her father and mother had left the house, a well-known and much honoured visitor arrived, the white-haired Guest whom men called the Wise, because his eyes had power at times to see what would befall in the days to come.

Gladly Gudrun welcomed her father's friend, and begged him to dismount and await Oswif's return from the fishing. "Nay," said the old man; "I must reach my kinsman Armod's house to-night. Yet because I

hear that in thy young head dwells much of thy father's wisdom, I will alight and talk with thee an hour."

Then Gudrun led the way to the hall, where there was laid out abundance of good cheer for Guest and his followers, and she set herself with merry and wise talk to entertain her aged visitor. All at once a strange look came over his face, as if he saw no more the things before his eyes, but gazed fearfully into the secrets of future days.

Then he asked the girl, who had begun to tremble at his altered looks: "Dost thou ever lie awake through the winter nights brooding over dreams that have disturbed thy sleep?" "Yea," she said; "four dreams haunt me by night, but why should I trouble thee with my fancies?" "Tell them quick," was his answer, "while yet I have the power to read their meaning." Then Gudrun went on: "In my first dream I stood by the side of a running stream. Suddenly I became aware that the coif I was wearing was ugly and unbecoming, and I tore it from my head, and cast it into the stream, and then I awoke laughing." "Now tell the second one," said Guest. "I saw myself standing by the shore of the great sea, and on my arm was a silver ring that I loved with a great love, but even as my hand caressed it, it slipped from me, and was lost among the waves, and I wept as if for a beloved friend whom I should see no more." "What came next?" said Guest. "It seemed to me," she went on, "that I walked on the road near by our home, and on my arm I wore a ring of gold. Suddenly I felt myself falling, and as I stretched out my hands to save myself, the ring struck against a stone and broke in two, and from the broken ends a stream of blood flowed out. While I looked on sorrowfully, it was borne into

my mind that somehow in me lay the fault whereby the ring was broken, rather than in any flaw in the thing itself." "Bad dreams," said Guest. "Tell me the next." "This is the last of the four," said the maiden. "Methought I wore a helm of gold, set with precious gems. Heavy it was, yet I had such pride in wearing it that the weight seemed as naught, and I hoped to keep it long; but without warning it was swept from my head into the stormy firth, and I saw it no more. Fain I would have wept, but no tears came; and then I woke, and heard the neat-herd go singing over the snow to his morning's work."

Guest was loth to sadden the heart of the lovely maid, yet, having questioned her of her dreams, he could not withhold the prophecy he read in them. He told her that hers should be a stirring life, full of love and hatred and wrongs, both given and received. "The coif thou didst throw from thee betokens a husband unloved, and soon to be shaken off by thine own deed. By the ring of silver is foreshadowed another husband, loving and beloved, but soon to be snatched from thy side by the hungry waves in the firth below. As to the golden ring, it tells of a third mate more worthy of thy love than the last, yet with flaws that shall lead to sorrow—see thou that they be not of thy making! The helm of gold is thy fourth and last husband. Well shalt thou love him, yet not without fear, and thy heart shall mourn when he too is swallowed up by the wild waves of Hwammfirth."

With a pale face Gudrun listened to the seer, and at the end she thanked him with trembling lips that he had at least shown her the truth, nor tried to deceive her with flattering tales.

Presently Guest and his followers mounted their steeds,

and rode away, while Gudrun stood watching them from the gate, her heart heavy with dim forebodings of all that Fate held in store for her.

Guest had ridden but a short way when he met Olaf, who insisted that he should return with him to Herdholt to taste the good cheer that stood ready in the great hall for all who would partake.

Olaf was a goodly man to look upon, great of limb, well-knit, with the dark-lashed, grey-blue eyes of his Irish mother. His voice was like a bell, and his fifty years of life had left no mark on his handsome face. His dress was like a king's, and he had a gold ring on his left arm, while his right hand carried a gold-wrought spear. Guest and his son Thord turned with him, and together they rode to Herdholt, and entered the hall through the well-carved door, made of solid wood brought across the sea from Norway. Guest gazed with pleasure on the fair paintings that adorned the panelling of the hall, where might be seen the gold-haired Baldur lying dead on his funeral pyre in the middle of his ship; there too was Frey with the gold-bristled boar, the dark-bearded Niörd, and Freyia with her grey cats playing at her feet. Thor was to be seen with his hammer, and Heimdall, whose golden horn shall terrify all hearts when he winds it in the Twilight of the Gods. Last of all was Odin, sad with the stories of sin and suffering brought to him by his ravens, Thought and Memory.

Then Olaf led his friend to the cloth-room, and showed his stores of finest napery and hangings—English linen and Flemish cloth, and embroideries brought from beyond the seas. His armoury too he showed, well plenished with coats of mail and bows and arrows and all manly weapons. Nor were the butteries unvisited, with their stores of fish

and meal and casks of wine and honey from the clover fields of Kent. They visited the cattle sheds and stables, and looked into the women's chamber, where the maids were busy at their spinning. When Guest at last departed, Olaf gave rich gifts to him and his son that made their hearts glad—a hat of priceless Russian fur wreathed round with a golden chain, a splendidly decorated sword, and a belt of English embroidery. As they were riding forth they saw a number of young men sporting in the waves of the firth with loud and joyous shouts, till one gave a shrill cry, and then they all swam to the shore, and began to put on their raiment. They were the sons and dependants of Olaf, and long and earnestly Guest gazed, as if he would fain read for them what the future hid. Olaf named them one by one, hoping for some promise of good, but no forecast of their fate came from the lips of the Wise one. Only as he turned away he spoke cheerfully: "Surely, my friend, it will make thee glad to know that Kiartan shall have greater glory than any other dweller in our land." With these words he smote his horse, and galloped on, leaving Olaf uncertain as to what his words might mean. When they had ridden some way, Thord saw with surprise that the tears were running down Guest's cheeks.

At last the old man spoke: "Dost thou wonder, my son, at these tears? Alas! they fall in very pity for the the woes that shall come upon our countryside. Fair were the men and women we saw to-day, yet over them hangs a heavy weight of woe. Love slaying love, victory that can only bring ruin, truth called lies, and hatred springing out of kindness—this shalt thou see, my son; yea, and thou shalt hear of Bodli with Kiartan lying dead at his feet, himself to come to a like end. The grave shall

close over me before these things fall out, nor would I have the thought of them darken thy life. Forget, and go cheerfully on thy way." Soon the father and son reached their kinsman Armod's house; and we hear no more of them in this tale.

Days passed, and the fame of Gudrun's beauty spread through the land, so that ere long a wooer came to ask her of her father. Thorvald was his name, a rough and passionate man, and, being very eager to win her, he got his desire, though it brought him but little happiness. Day by day Gudrun loved him less, and at last she could no more hide the scorn she felt for him. Then hatred mingled with the love that raged in his heart, and one day in his passion he struck her on the face. In silence Gudrun took the blow, but on a day when Thorvald had gone from home, she rose up and went her way to Bathstead; nor would she return to her husband, but rested not until she got from the Hill of Laws a decree of divorce, and so was free to abide once more in her father's house, as before her unhappy marriage.

Not long did she remain there, for ere many weeks were passed Thord sought her for his wife. He was brave and fair, and she lived with him in great happiness for three short months. Then the fated came to pass, and on a June night, while Gudrun lay fast asleep, her husband was rolled towards the cliffs, dead and cold, in the dark waters of the firth.

Once again Gudrun returned to her old home, but this time with a fierce and bitter pain in her heart. Winter came and spring, and now the name of Kiartan was in the mouths of all men. Great of frame and strong beyond his years, none could rival him in manly deeds. A

swift runner and strong swimmer, of sure aim with his bow, and a perfect swordsman, skilful to work in the smithy, and withal gentle in speech and manner and learned in the art of rhyme, what wonder that his fame spread through the land? Gudrun heard the gossips talk, yet heeded not, for still she mourned for the husband she had lost. One evening, when midsummer was at hand, the sound of horse-hoofs was heard drawing near to Bathstead. Oswif rose to see who might be approaching, and presently he returned leading his friend Olaf by the hand, while two young men followed them up the hall. Gudrun, sitting alone and sad on the dais, knew at once that the youth with the joyous face and golden hair must be Kiartan, and the one beside him, black-haired and high of brow, could be none other than Bodli. Unwillingly she rose and greeted them, and listened in silence to Olaf's words of kindly sympathy. As the evening wore on she began to join in the common talk, and by degrees Kiartan won her to cheerfulness by memories of the happy days of childhood when they played together on the shore. Ere he rode away at night he had given his heart to the lovely Gudrun, and in her eyes he could read the dawn of an answering love.

Happily the days now passed for these two, and Bodli shared in their joy. So might their lives have sped in peace and contentment but for the stirring news that came from Norway. King Olaf had invaded the country, defeated and slain Hacon the King, and driven away his son; and now he ruled Norway with wisdom and justice, and the land enjoyed great prosperity under his sway.

Eagerly did Kiartan listen to the tales of King Olaf's prowess, and ever in his heart grew the wish that he too might go forth and win the fame and honour that Iceland

could not offer to her sons. The heart of Gudrun grew heavy when she saw what was in her lover's mind, yet she would not keep him back from the life he longed for.

Bodli must needs go where Kiartan led; but his brow was sad and his words few, and the parting from Gudrun weighed heavy on his heart, for he knew now that his love had gone out unbidden to his friend's betrothed.

At length, when summer once more made green the fields round Herdholt and Bathstead, all was ready; a fair ship lay at Burgfirth, with Kalf for its captain; the last farewells were spoken, and Kiartan and Bodli, with a goodly following, stepped on board, and soon the shores of Iceland were lost to sight.

They reached Drontheim in safety, and found the praise of King Olaf in every mouth, yet his latest decree had filled the people with consternation. He had but lately been won over himself from heathendom, and he now commanded all his subjects, like him, to give up the old Norse gods and accept the Christian faith under pain of death.

When Kiartan and his men arrived they found three ships from Iceland lying in the bay, and from their crews they learned that at the coming Yule-tide they would all be called upon by the King to make their choice between baptism and death.

Even so it fell out. Kiartan and his men were summoned to King Olaf's hall. They came in no gentle or submissive mood—a small band indeed, but full of courage, and sworn to obey no lord save their own chosen leader.

Silently they listened while Olaf's German bishop expounded at length the new gospel which they were expected to embrace. When he had ended, the mighty voice of the King rang out: "Ye have heard the faith—

my faith—what think ye of it?" Loud cheers from the men-at-arms greeted his words, and Bodli and the Icelanders drew their swords, not knowing what might betide.

Kiartan alone stood smiling and unmoved in the midst of the uproar. "Peace!" cried the King, "not yet have I given the signal for slaughter!" Then turning to Kiartan, whose gallant looks pleased him well, he offered him a place and honour at his court, and freedom to worship in the old way; but as for the rest of the Iceland men, he added: "I will deal with them as seems good to me." Scornfully Kiartan rejected his offer. "Like a fool dost thou speak, O King! Each man in my band is as a brother to me, and as brothers we will live and die together." Olaf's generous heart was moved by the fearless bearing and proud words of the young leader, and he yielded his point. "Thou and thy men shall go in peace," he said; "only come now and sit at my side as an equal, and let thy good sword be as ready to serve me as it was to defend the rights of those whom thou leadest." Then there was great rejoicing throughout that crowded hall, and men ate and drank their fill, and good fellowship bound together them of Norway and of Iceland.

Day by day the love between Kiartan and the King waxed stronger, for each was of a knightly spirit, and many a noble deed was planned between them. What Kiartan would not do to save his life, he afterwards did gladly of his own free will, and before Yule-tide was over, he and his men appeared in the great minster, and were baptised into the Christian faith.

With King Olaf lived his sister, the fair Ingibiord. Lovely she was, and wise and good, and Kiartan found it pleasant to linger by her side and listen to her gentle talk. Nor was it strange that the heart of Ingibiord went out

in love to one so goodly to look upon, so renowned in arms, and so held in honour throughout Norway; for many were the brave deeds done by Kiartan, and his fame was great in the land.

Thus the days passed merrily at court, and the men of Herdholt rested and were glad. Only the brow of Bodli darkened, and his heart grew heavier day by day; for his love to Gudrun left him no peace of mind, and half he hoped and half he feared that Kiartan would prove a false lover, and leave him free to woo her for himself.

Long they tarried in Norway, for King Olaf had sent Thangbrand the priest to Iceland to compel the men thereof to turn from Odin and from Thor to the new faith. Three converts only could Thangbrand count when he had to fly for his life from the enraged islanders. Determined to carry his point, Olaf sent another mission to Iceland, and with them went Bodli and the men of Herdholt. "Thou, Kiartan, and three others," said the King, "shall bide with me here as hostages till that stubborn people bend to my will." Great was the joy of Bodli at the thought of meeting Gudrun once more, yet dread lest he might turn traitor to his friend weighed heavy on his heart, and it was with troubled looks he went to bid Kiartan farewell and to take his greetings for the friends at home.

He found Kiartan as usual glad and light-hearted, troubled with no regrets for the past nor fears for the time to come. Bodli promised to tell at home of all the honour and fame he had won in Norway; then Kiartan looked him straight in the face, and said: "Yea, tell all this to Gudrun, and say to her we shall assuredly meet again."

So they parted; and Kiartan returned to his easy and joyful life and to the smiles of the lovely Ingibiord, while

Bodli set sail for Iceland, full of longing and joy and fear.

It so chanced that on a day in late autumn Gudrun had wandered out alone, heavy-hearted at the thought of another winter at hand and no hope of Kiartan's return. Suddenly she heard the sound of horse-hoofs, and saw on the crest of a neighbouring hill, a scarlet-clad warrior whom she soon knew to be Bodli Thorleikson. Half fainting she waited for his news. "Kiartan bides still in Norway, held in high honour of King and people. Well and gladsome he is, and he looks to see thee once again. Such were the words he bade me bear to thee." So spake Bodli, and the anger of Gudrun flashed out at the coldness of the greeting sent by her lover. She railed at Bodli, then broke down, and with tears besought him to tell her the truth.

In his desire to be true to his friend, he told her of all the great deeds that had won fame for Kiartan in Norway, and of the love in which he was held by the King, and said no word of his dealings with Ingibiord.

Gudrun listened unsatisfied. "Why, then," she said, "tarrieth he still in Norway?" Bodli's love could no longer be held in check by his sense of honour, and forth rushed the tale—all true, and yet such as a friend should not have spoken—of Kiartan's devotion to the beautiful Ingibiord, and how King and people alike trusted they should wed. He told too how Olaf and Kiartan dreamed of bringing all Denmark and England under their sway, and he let Gudrun believe that ambition had drowned the love that once was hers. At first she bent humbly before the blow, and prayed that the lover who had been false to her might yet be happy with another bride. No look did she cast on Bodli, who found his way home to

Herdholt, and sat there for three days silent and as if bereft of reason.

On the fourth day he rode to Bathstead in answer to Gudrun's summons, and again the story of Kiartan's fame and of his forgetfulness was repeated.

At times a suspicion crossed Gudrun's mind that Bodli might be deceiving her in hopes of winning her for himself, for not unknown to her was the secret of his love. Yet Kiartan came not, and the stray gossip that reached her from Norway made it yet more certain that Iceland would see him no more, till at length all hope died out of the heart of Gudrun, and she gave herself up to despair.

And how fared it with Kiartan all these days while his betrothed wept for him in vain? For a time his life went on right merrily, but by degrees weariness crept over his spirit, and a longing for the old home-life awoke within him. Even to Ingibiord his manner changed, and though he ever answered her gently and courteously, yet she knew that his heart was far away, and that even when he spoke with her a shadow had fallen between them.

Then came great news to Norway, rejoicing the heart of King Olaf. Iceland had turned from its ancient gods, and the Christian faith was now the creed of the land. The King sent for the four hostages, and told them they might depart laden with rich gifts if so they would; or if it were their will to remain, they would find wealth and honour among his people, and his smiling glance fell on Kiartan as he said to himself: "*He*, of a surety, will never leave us!"

But no answering smile lit up Kiartan's face. After long silence he spoke. "O King, our thanks be thine for all the kindness thou hast done us and the honour I have won at thy hands, nor think me lacking in gratitude if I

accept this thy greatest boon—even the liberty to seek again my own country. Three years is it since I left home and kindred, and one dearest to me of all." Olaf was deeply hurt, yet pride forbade him to show his disappointment, and the day drew to its close with feasting and words of cheer. While his ships were being prepared for sea Kiartan spent his days in troubled thought. He well knew the pain his going would cause to Ingibiord; nor was the pain hers alone, for he had come to love her with a very true love, though he still held Gudrun as queen of his heart. Their last meeting was full of anguish, yet Ingibiord had no word of reproach for him or of hatred for her rival. Nay, she even charged him to bear to his bride a choice gift—a coif of gold and richest embroidery fit for royal wear—and to tell her whence it came; then with one last sad kiss she bade him farewell, knowing that in this world they would meet no more.

Nor was Kiartan's parting from the King easy, though Olaf spake nothing but words of love and regret at losing so dear a friend. As a last gift he pressed on him a noble sword, begging him never to let it leave his side, for he felt that troubled days lay before him. With a heavy heart Kiartan thanked the King, bade him a sorrowful farewell, and stepped on board his ship. His rowers settled to the oars, the long waves bore him out to sea, and Norway saw him no more, then or ever again.

And how had things gone at Herdholt and Bathstead while Kiartan continued his easy, careless life at King Olaf's court? Gudrun, in despair of her lover's return, listened at first with anger, then with indifference to Bodli's eager wooing, and at length gave a listless consent to his wishes. Their ill-omened wedding took place

in joyless fashion at Bathstead some months before Kiartan's return; and there Bodli now dwelt with his wife, among her jealous and evil-hearted brothers. All this Kiartan heard from his sister Thurid, who came to meet him on his landing at Burgfirth. Another maiden was there too to welcome the wanderers on their return. This was Refna, sister of the stout Kalf, who steered the good ship that brought them home. She was a gentle maid, with great dark eyes, and a soft, sweet face that seemed always asking for love or pity.

One day, soon after his arrival, Kiartan surprised her with Ingibiord's regal coif on her head. She blushed deeply, and said it had been put there by others against her will, and Kiartan, in his kindly way, said: "Sure, they were right who put it there! Happy would the man be who owned the coif and her who wears it!" Poor little Refna flushed again with joy and pride at the careless words, and whispered: "How could any maid say *nay*, should one, so great and so kind as thou art, desire her love?" And bitter was her disappointment when Kiartan turned away with a scoffing laugh. "All women are alike to me. They are all good—all blessings, doubtless—but not for me!" His heart was sore and bitter with thoughts of his lost love and of the false friend who had stolen her from him. Yet he went back to the home at Herdholt, and lived his life bravely, though he knew well that there could be no more of the old joyousness that filled his heart before he learned how Bodli had deceived him.

When the news of Kiartan's return reached Bathstead it was received with glee by the malicious brothers of Gudrun, who saw in it a chance of humbling the house of Olaf. They hated Bodli because of his melancholy

looks, and because, having won Gudrun, he took no joy in his life for the remorse he felt for having been false to Kiartan. They hoped now for a deadly feud between these kinsmen, being filled with envy for the fame that they had won.

Bodli heard with dismay that Kiartan was again at Herdholt, not that he feared aught from him, but because Gudrun must now learn of his own treachery. On the night the news reached him he sat alone from twilight to dawn brooding over his troubles; in the dim morning light Gudrun glided up the hall where he was sitting, and with bitter and scornful words upbraided him for having separated her from Kiartan, whom she still loved with all her heart, and she cursed him aloud for having ruined her life. Bodli listened helplessly, and when she stopped for breath, he murmured: "Would that I were dead! yet before I die I would fain hear a kind word from him I wronged, for kinder he is than thou!"

So the months wore on heavily, and Kiartan passed his days in moody silence, dwelling apart from his friends, and caring not who came or went. Often Kalf brought his sister Refna, with her kind eyes, to comfort him in his loneliness, but it was as though he saw her not.

Yule-tide came, and Oswif sent to ask the men of Herdholt, as his custom was, to hold the feast with him at Bathstead. Olaf urged Kiartan to come, hoping that the hatred between the houses might be healed in that season of good will. To please his father Kiartan agreed, though all unwillingly, and went with him to the feast at Bathstead.

Bodli hoped much from his coming, and met him with the old kind talk, but the heart of Kiartan was too sore

for him to answer in the same spirit. As for the former lovers, they met without visible sign of the passions that were raging within, and though Bodli glanced anxiously from one to the other, he could read nothing of their feelings in Kiartan's cold looks and Gudrun's proud and untroubled smile.

When the guests were departing each received a gift from Bodli, and at the last he ordered three horses of a noble breed to be brought to the door. These, with humble words, he begged Kiartan to accept. Firmly, but not in anger, the gifts were declined. "Strive no longer, O Bodli, against fate," said Kiartan. "Friends we can never be again, and the best we can do is to keep as far apart as we may."

On the way home Olaf spoke cheerfully of the feast, rejoicing that it had passed over peacefully, but Kiartan warned him that there was no use in keeping up an outward show of good fellowship when there was naught but hatred and jealousy within.

Had Kiartan at that feast showed any sign of softening, had Gudrun even by a look let him see how dear she still held him, kinder feelings might have risen and the old friendship been revived; but pride was strong in the hearts of both, and the meeting left them farther apart than before.

Then mischief-makers began to whisper to Gudrun that Kiartan and Refna had plighted their troth, and their wedding would shortly be held.

The evil sons of Oswif took care that Kiartan on his side should be told that Gudrun had quite forgotten him, and now rejoiced in her husband's love; and further, that Bodli would ere long sail for England to carry war against King Ethelred, and that Gudrun could not bear

to part from him, but would sail too, and take her share in the brave deeds that were to be done.

Then jealousy, as well as disappointed love, raged in the heart of Kiartan. "Not only has he stolen my betrothed —now must he steal my fame likewise! The name of Bodli shall be in every mouth, and I and the deeds I did in Norway shall straightway be forgotten."

A year had passed since the men of Herdholt had landed at Burgfirth, and in the great stead Olaf held a high festival. Among the guests sat Refna, gentle and pale, with eyes for none but Kiartan. When the feast was over his sister Thurid asked if he had noted the maid, and how white and sorrowful she had grown. "What wouldst thou do," she said, "were Refna pining for thy love?" "What should I do?" he answered. "No heart have I now to give, and she must learn to live on as I do, dreary though the days may be." "Then," said Thurid, "not long shall her life be upon earth." Kiartan bethought him that he might yet save some shreds of joy from his ruined hopes; and partly from pity, partly because it was sweet to find himself once more beloved, he took Refna to his heart, and he and she were wed.

When Gudrun heard the news she was filled with rage and grief, nor were the taunts thrown at her by her hateful brothers meant to soothe her. "What thinks our sister now?" she heard Ospak shout to Thorolf. "Does she still believe that Kiartan will slay our long-visaged Bodli and come and claim her for his bride?" And she fled from their cruel sneers to nurse her passion in secret. More and more she came to believe that Kiartan's love had been but shallow, while Bodli had faced shame and dishonour that he might win her. She whispered to herself: "Perhaps in the life to come, O my husband, I may love thee

as thou dost deserve." Yet she showed him nothing of her kinder feelings, and he went about as ever, with a wan face and a heart full of dole and pain.

Olaf and Oswif were fain to keep up their ancient friendship; and, hoping that it might make for peace, Oswif brought his household to the autumn festival at Herdholt, and Olaf prevailed on Kiartan to sit at table and do honour to their guests.

The gentle Refna saw with a sinking heart the wondrous beauty of Gudrun and the cold and scornful smile with which she glanced around the hall. The smile gave way to a gleam of hate when Kiartan set his wife in her rightful place beside his mother Thorgerd at the head of the board. Next day Thorgerd insisted that Refna should wear at supper the glittering coif given to Kiartan by the Princess of Norway to bear to his bride. Ospak saw Gudrun turn pale at the sight, and he muttered: "Sister, should not that gaud belong by rights to thee?" Kiartan was quick to note the malicious looks of the Bathstead brethren, and he turned to Refna: "I love thy head best uncovered, my beloved. What thou wearest may yet cause blood to flow, for the sons of Oswif look on thee with no good will."

Next morning, when the guests were departing, Kiartan busied himself looking after their comfort, and that he might move about the more easily, he threw down on his bed the jewelled sword that King Olaf had given him, and which rarely left his side. When the last of the guests had ridden away it was found that the sword had gone also. Nowhere could it be seen, though diligent search was made. Then An the Black, one of the household servants, slipped out of doors with a grim smile on his face. He returned presently with the missing sword

hidden under his cloak—the sword alone, for the costly scabbard had disappeared. He related how, suspecting the Bathstead men of the theft, he had followed them afar, and saw how Thorolf drew something from under his cloak and thrust it into the ground. When he had ridden on, An came up, and found the King's gift sticking in the damp, peaty soil. Kiartan took the naked weapon with a sigh: "I at least," he said, "was not the one first to unsheath the sword."

Soon it came to the knowledge of Kiartan that the sons of Oswif were making a boast of having done him dishonour in so dealing with his sword, and that in scorn they had called him Mireblade. Yet such was his gentleness that he passed over their insolence, and went with his father as usual to the Christmas feast at Bathstead. Thorgerd told Refna she must that day wear the Queen's Gift, as the jewelled coif had come to be called. The girl would fain have refused, for she knew the strife it might cause, but Kiartan smilingly bade her do as his mother wished; so the coif was brought out, and at the feast it shone like a star on the lovely head of Refna.

Gudrun scarcely gave a look to her or Kiartan; she sat beside Bodli, and made his heart glad with her smiles and caresses, so that he thought all must henceforth be right between them.

Next morning, when Olaf and his household were preparing to depart, Refna found that the coif was missing. She whispered to her husband of the loss, whilst Ospak stood and watched them, the colour coming and going in his evil face. Kiartan laughed. "Light come, light gone, Refna, yet we shall surely find it if it is still above ground." Thorberg turned angrily to Gudrun, and said that in her father's house such an insult could only be

wiped out with blood. Scornfully she answered: "The coif was given to Kiartan by the Norse Princess for his bride. Did she then mean it for Refna or for me?"

To avoid further wrangling Kiartan called his men to saddle, and he asked Bodli to come with him a little way. To Ospak he said: "Beware lest we meet; live well and happy, but cross not my path again or it may go ill with thee." Then, with a mocking laugh, he shook his bridle, and galloped after his company. Bodli followed him unarmed, not sure whether there would be war or peace between them. Gently Kiartan spoke, but warned him that it was too late now to hope for good fellowship while he dwelt among the insolent sons of Oswif. "Yet," he said, "let us never forget, O Bodli, the joyous days of old and the love that knit us together. Let us forgive whatever ill the one may have done to the other—yea, let us forgive beforehand whatsoever of wrong may yet fall out between us—that so our love may be remembered of men and not the strife into which we are surely drifting." Bodli lamented the ill he had done to Kiartan, and prayed that if they ever met sword to sword, he might win at his hand the death he had often longed for.

So noble was the spirit of Kiartan, and so unwilling was he to grieve his father by an open quarrel with the house of Bathstead, that he bided quietly in his steading, taking no vengeance for the theft of the fatal coif. The spring came round once more; and one evening he found Refna weeping bitterly, and by degrees got from her the tale of her grief.

At midday she had fallen asleep by the side of a brook, and was lost in pleasant dreams. Suddenly she was roused by the talk of two women who were washing the household linen in the stream. "Yes," said the one,

"Kiartan sits still nor punishes the Bathstead men for their double theft. Had Gudrun been the bride and suffered such a loss her evil brothers would have paid for it dearly!" "Doubtless," added the other, "Gudrun and our Kiartan would be glad at heart did Bodli Thorleikson and Refna lie dead at their feet!"

Kiartan spoke words of love and comfort, and kissed and caressed Refna till her tears were dried; yet for two days he went about with a heavy heart, brooding over the idle talk of the women.

At length he summoned his men to arm and come to the hall at midnight. Through the hangings, Refna watched them as, spear in hand, they came clanking into the hall, talking and laughing beneath the red lamp-light. Kiartan, clad in armour, bade her farewell as she lay trembling at the deeds that might be done that day. He told her he would bring her back a noble gift at night, and that she should call together glee-men to welcome them home. Then he kissed her, and she heard the clashing of armour and the trampling of horses; and presently silence fell upon the old homestead.

That morning the men of Bathstead were rudely wakened by the sound of horns and trumpets. Running to the door, they found the gates of the court held by some sixty of Olaf's men, all fully armed and ready for battle.

In vain Ospak swaggered and made a show of fight. Kiartan bade him beware, and remember that his sword, the King's Gift, was now naked, though not of his own wish. None of the house should be harmed if they kept quiet, but he meant to help himself to flocks and herds to atone for the loss of the scabbard and the coif. Helpless, the men of Bathstead sat in their impotent rage,

listening to the shouts and laughter of the Herdholt men, the blowing of horns and clank of armour, as they gathered together the cattle from the pastures and prepared to drive them home.

Then Kiartan stepped out from among his men, and taunted the sons of Oswif, till, stung by his words and goaded on by Gudrun, Bodli armed himself, and rushed out to face what seemed certain death. Kiartan called to his men to shed no drop of blood, and with their shields close locked, they pushed him back to the shelter of the hall, while he moaned in despair: "Would I had died to-day by my foster-brother's hand!" Kiartan's cheerful voice rang out: "Nay, cousin, if thou wilt die by me, let it be on some well-fought field, where at least we may gain some fame of one another. As for you, ye blustering fools, know that I waited from Yule-tide till now for the debt ye had to pay. At last I take it in full, and leave you in its place a burden of shame."

Refna, watching on the hillside that evening, saw a cloud of dust moving along the road, then spears and helmets and gay pennons, and in the midst of the troop the Bathstead cattle with wreaths of flowers twined round their horns and dew-lapped necks. Quickly she bade the minstrels stand forth and all her women in their gayest attire; and with music of harps and fiddle-bows and loud and joyful shouts, Kiartan was welcomed home to Herdholt. He leapt from his horse, threw his arms round Refna, and cried gaily: "Now has a goodly price been taken for thy coif!"

"A goodly price indeed for a girl's coif," echoed Olaf, who was standing near, "yet for Kiartan's wasted youth and for the peaceful old age that I shall never see, not too much—not too much!"

After these dealings Kiartan rode carelessly as before through the country, and the sons of Oswif dared not openly lift hand against him.

And how fared Gudrun meanwhile? Her rage and despair had known no bounds when she saw Kiartan happy with his new-wed wife. Then had come the shame of the stolen coif and the dreadful day when she and her brothers had cowered in the hall while the Herdholt men had carried off their flocks and herds, and Bodli had gone out alone against them, only to return baffled and ashamed. The more she brooded the more hopeless her life appeared, and a vain longing seized her for an end, were it even through the death of Kiartan, to the weary path she was treading.

A day came when news reached Bathstead that Kiartan had gone west to visit his friend Thorkel at the Knoll, and that he would ride home through Swinedale next morning with only two followers. Now, Swinedale was near to Bathstead, and Gudrun heard her brothers plotting how they might waylay him there and do him to death. Bodli, they said, must lead, for he was stout and well skilled in arms.

All night Gudrun lay moaning, at one time hoping it might be Bodli's lot to fall; then the memory of Refna's longing eyes swept over her, and she knew she could have no peace on earth so long as Kiartan lived.

In the early morning she heard the trampling of many feet in the hall, the ringing of armour, and the handling of weapons. Then Bodli with his haggard face bent over her, and she heard him say: "I go, Gudrun, and I pray that this night I may be brought home dead." He pressed her to his breast, and with a wild farewell left her lying half unconscious, while he rode off through the morning sun-

shine with the five sons of Oswif and three strong men-at-arms.

Kiartan had risen early that day to ride home to Herdholt. Thorkel with twelve men kept him company for many miles, but where the pass opened into Swinedale he thanked them, and sent them back, saying his way was easy now, and he had no fear of aught the cowardly sons of Oswif could do against him. Then he rode eastward, accompanied only by An the Black and another house-servant, Thorarin by name.

A herdsman had gone out with his master that morning to look after the mares and foals that were pasturing in Swinedale, and they two were the only witnesses of what now befell. They saw the Bathstead men creep up stealthily to a hollow worn in the hillside by a stream: "Now," said the herdsman, "we knew what manner of men these were, and guessed some ill deed was on hand, and we saw well what it would be when three horsemen came riding down the pass—the tallest and best of them Kiartan Olafson. I had fain warned him of his danger, but my master bade me lie close nor meddle in great folks' affairs, by which only harm comes to poor men."

On came Kiartan merry and fearless, singing a brave old song in Odin's honour, when he was startled by a sudden blast from the Bathstead horn. He saw the murderous band with Bodli at their head, and he and his men leapt from their horses, and stood at bay in front of a rock.

Kiartan never looked nobler nor of higher courage than when he thus stood waiting the onslaught of his treacherous enemies, yet when he saw Bodli among them his face changed, and for a second his hands fell to his side

—for a second only, then his spear whistled through the air, and Thorolf fell to the ground with a mighty crash. For a space naught could be seen but the confused gleam of swords, nor heard save the clash of steel on steel, the ring of armour, and the sharp cry or groan that told when a stroke went home.

Only Bodli Thorleikson, pale as death, stood looking on nor sharing in the fierce struggle.

Out of breath, the combatants paused a short space, and with taunts and threats the brothers urged Bodli to join the fray. Unable to move him, they rushed once more upon the three, who stood close and as yet unhurt.

Soon An the Black fell, but not unavenged, for Oswif's nephew Gudlaug in turn dropped to the ground, a limb hewn off by Kiartan's sword. Thorarin had taken to flight, pursued by two of Oswif's men-at-arms, and Kiartan was left alone in the midst of his enemies, with mail-coat torn and sword dinted and bent, breathless, but still unwounded.

Bodli stood like one in a dream till Ospak lifted his hand, and struck him in the face, crying: "Go home, coward and traitor—safe and whole, carry thy shame back to Gudrun!"

Still he moved not till Kiartan called his name aloud; when he met the friendly eyes he covered his face with his mailed hand, and trembled like one in a palsy.

Kiartan's words came loud and clear: "They are right, my foster-brother, dear friend of olden days! Thy part is indeed with Gudrun's house. Then strike, and end this strife. The blow is already forgiven."

Bodli drew his sword slowly, and turned towards Kiartan

with wild eyes and heavy, unwilling steps. It seemed at first as if Kiartan would defend himself to the end; he lifted his sword, then with a weary smile let it drop to the ground, and in a flash Bodli's weapon was buried deep in his unguarded side.

The slayer flung himself on his friend with loud lamentations and frantic prayers for forgiveness, but the dying man had no more words for him; with one last cry of "Farewell, Gudrun!" he fell back dead upon Bodli's breast.

The sons of Oswif hastened home to Bathstead with news of the fight, and Bodli was left alone on the hillside with his dead.

Such was the story of the slaying of Kiartan as told by the herdsman and his master.

When bearers came to carry away the slain they found Bodli bending over the still, white face, and talking earnestly, as if his friend could yet hear and answer. Silently he followed as they bore Kiartan to Bathstead and laid him in the hall with due honour and observance.

To Gudrun, who met him in the porch, the words of Bodli were few. "I have done thy will—is it enough?" No answer came, and he went on: "I did it for thy sake, Gudrun. Speak to me one word of comfort." All the notice she took was to put out her hand towards him, but whether to show some pity or to thrust him from her, he never knew, for just then the bearers came tramping through the hall, and they were separated.

Next night there were heavy hearts round the board at Herdholt as Olaf raised his cup and bade all drink to the best man Iceland ever knew. Deeply they drank to Kiartan, and told tales of his valour, while Thorgerd

listened, her heart filled with wild rage against his murderer. Drawing King Olaf's sword from under her cloak, she threw it on the table, and swore on it that ere three summers were over, Bodli should die, must it even be by her own hand.

Stern shouts from her sons rang through the hall; but Olaf rose slowly, and took the jewelled sword in his hand, and broke it across his knees. He threw the pieces on the floor, and spoke thus: "Gone is gone, nor would the death of Bodli bring back our Kiartan. If indeed ye must avenge you, fall on the base sons of Oswif, not on Bodli, who was but as the sword in their hands."

All that day the sons of Oswif had lain hidden, in terror of the vengeance of the Herdholt men. In vain they begged for succour from friends and neighbours—all said the deed was basely done, and they must look to their own swords to protect them. Next morning it seemed to them that their doom was near when they saw Olaf, his sons and dependants, and a great crowd of country-folk, approaching their stead. In solemn procession they came, but not to kill. Having claimed their dead, they bore him home in silence to rest in peace among his forefathers.

The sons of Oswif need not have felt such fear, for men's hearts were weary of strife, and no one sought to slay them. Only they suffered fines and outlawry and the contempt of all men of noble minds.

Olaf lived three years only after his beloved Kiartan's death. Then his sons remembered their mother Thorgerd's oath, and on a day they set upon Bodli, so that he died under their swords, defending himself gallantly to the last. Refna went home, broken-hearted, to her father's

house, and ere long she faded away, and found rest in the grave from all her sorrows. As for Gudrun, she felt after the slaughter of Bodli, that Bathstead, with all its bitter memories, was no longer a home for her, and she left it, to dwell in Holyfell by the sea.

There she lived in peace and reared her sons, and when they were grown and had gone out into the world, she wedded Thorkel, a man of might, and held in high honour in Iceland. But in him too was Guest's prophecy fulfilled, and ere many years had passed, he sank among the stormy waves of the firth.

Gudrun was again left alone and widowed, yet she bore herself with a high spirit, nor gave way to unseemly grief even when her sight failed, for more and more in her heart there grew the hope of a life to come.

One summer evening she sat at Holyfell with her son Bodli, who had come to see her after long journeyings—a gallant man like his father, that other Bodli, and a doer of mighty deeds. The air was sweet with the scent of new-mown hay; and the chiming of the chapel bells, the murmur of the sea, and the singing of their own house-carles on their way home from the fields, came softly to their ears. After long silence Bodli spoke. "Of these dead men whom thou knewest long ago, mother, which didst thou love the best?"

Slowly she answered: "Thorkel my husband was a great and wise chief; and never was there a mightier man in arms than Bodli thy father, and well thou wouldest have loved him. Thord, too, was a great man, and learned and wise in council. As for Thorwald, he was like a stinging weed that men pull up and cast away."

Bodli smiled. "Still, mother, thou hast not told me what I desired to know."

Then, with sightless eyes that yet seemed to gaze at Herdholt through the grey distance, and hands stretched out for those whom she had lost, and tremulous voice, Gudrun answered softly: "I did the worst, my son, to him whom I loved the best!"

The Lady of the Land

A PARTY of Italians, who had been roaming the seas in search of fame and fortune, anchored one morning in the bay of a small island off the shores of Greece. Not looking for any adventure in this quiet little spot, one of the seafarers, a young nobleman of Florence, left his companions, and wandered idly by himself far inland.

In the course of his rambles he came to a valley, thick with tangled copse and tall cypress-trees. High above the green expanse of woodland rose the ruins of what had once been a magnificent castle. But the days of its splendour were far past. For long, long years the gardens had been untended, the grass grew rank on the terraces, and the stream that had once plashed its clear waters into the marble-paved pools beneath the lawns now gurgled amongst a forest of tall weeds and rushes that almost choked its passage.

Making his way to the deserted castle, the young Italian passed the remains of a temple, its carved pillars and altar of smooth black stone all that were left from the decay of centuries. Close by the temple ruins stood the gateway of the castle. The doors had long since disappeared, but the solid archway was still complete, and above his head the stranger could see upon a slab some carving of a

huge serpent coiled around its prey—a winged creature, but of what shape could not be learned from the weather-beaten old stone. Beyond the gateway he found a cloistered court, where briers ran wild upon the pillars and overgrew the fountain that had once played in the centre of the enclosure. The statues of many a Greek god and goddess lay shattered by the hand of superstitious peasants, who had feared such images might harbour evil for their country. The head of Jupiter was hewn off, Apollo the swift-footed was now lamed, Venus was hidden in a mass of rubbish, and Diana no more fit for the race than her twin-brother Apollo, in that she was bound ankle to ankle by the rusty cable of a wrecked ship.

The Florentine examined every room in the castle with interest. They were all of handsome size, and showed that in its day the building had been wonderfully fine, though now that it stood bare and empty it was hard to imagine its past splendour. Having mounted to the highest turret, from which he looked far across country to the Italian boat lying at anchor in the quiet sea, he returned to the hall, and would have left the castle, satisfied that he had explored it thoroughly, when he remembered that he had not seen the dungeons.

A few steps led him to a crypt beneath the hall, where he noticed, at the farther end, a stout door set on hinges. It was new and undecayed, and attracted by its contrast to the ruins around, and anxious to see if perchance some one were living in these underground parts, he threw it open. The air of the room he entered was fresh and warm, and quite unlike the closeness of a vault. As for the furnishings of the place, they were most exquisite. The walls were covered with rich hangings, the floor inlaid with precious stone · there were daintily carved

ivory chairs set about the room, with piles of soft cushions, and in the corner stood a pretty couch of Eastern workmanship.

The wealth and beauty of the place filled the young Florentine with awe, for there was something unearthly in its charm, and he feared that it might be a trap set by an evil spirit to ensnare the rash adventurer.

But curiosity overcame his fear. Another door faced him on the opposite side of the room, and hastily crossing the mosaic floor, he raised the silver latch, and found himself standing in a treasury of pure gold! Gold coins were stacked upon the floor, with here and there a great cauldron made of the same metal; the walls and roof were gold-plated, and the very tables in the room were solid gold. The only place where his eye did not catch a gleam of yellow was in the bowlfuls of precious gems and the piles of costly purple robes that formed part of the treasure in this underground storehouse.

On a panel above another doorway he saw in raised figures of gold a serpent twining its coils around its victim—the same shapes that he had noticed on the worn stone above the castle entrance—only in this case the second form was as easily distinguished as the serpent: it was a maiden, with widespread wings upon her shoulders, who was struggling in vain against the tightening clasp of the monster!

As he stood lost in wonder beneath this carving, he heard the murmur of a soft voice behind the door. A lady as fair as the place she lived in, would be of no common beauty, thought he, and eagerly he opened the third door.

Gold again! Yes; masses of it. The first thing he saw was the golden hair of a lady, rippling in waves down

to the very floor, as she sat combing it on an ivory throne by the steps that led to her deep-set marble bath. Her eyes were bent downward, and, not seeing the door pushed ajar, she went on murmuring in sad tones: "Another day flown, and no one has come! Another year of cruel misery for me!"

Hardly had she spoken when she raised her head, and, shaking aside her tresses, met the eager gaze of the stranger.

He was slowly preparing to address her, but so great a difficulty had he in finding words that she was the first to break the silence. She asked him why he came—was it in hopes of carrying away some of the treasures of the place? A vain hope, since she could work spells to protect them against any fortune-seeker. Or could it be that he came not for gold, but for love of her, knowing her story?

Her timid yet entreating glance, her beauty and her pretty Greek talk, had charmed the Florentine so completely that he could only answer in her tongue how ready he would be to help her, if she would tell him what had to be done. A stranger from a far country, who knew nothing of the castle or its owners, he would count it happiness to learn how he might risk his life to win her favour.

"You are a gallant knight," cried the lady, "and a brave one too, I think. Listen to the tale of my misery. In pity for me you will perhaps dare the deed that will free me from the fate I have suffered these four hundred years. You start! But that is the time I have lived under the ban of Diana's anger.

"My father was lord of this island long ago. He built the castle, and by his cunning he drew all the gold that

you have seen here out of the hard grey rocks. He had knowledge above other men, for he could make a garden of the wilderness, and by his skill in herbs he could bring back the sick from the gates of death. But of one thing he had no understanding: he knew nothing of a maiden's heart. I was his only child, and he vowed to Diana that I should be her handmaid, serve in her temple which stood by the castle gate, and remain ever unwed. Oh! why did he so rashly pledge a young girl's love to the goddess? By my twentieth summer I had a lover to whom I could not help giving my whole heart. In my love to him I was false to Diana, and in dire anger at my broken vows the goddess caused my lover's death, ended my father's days in grief, and then when all my friends were gone, she wreaked her vengeance on me.

"I was changed into a hideous, fork-tongued dragon, doomed to lie all day guarding the treasure in this store-house; while at night I must range the island or sport with other monsters in the green sea, to the terror of many a poor sailor at the helm.

"One day in each year Diana grants me to appear as the maiden I once was, so that if any man visit the castle within these short twelve hours, I may tell him how he can free me from this dreadful fate, and earn the gratitude and the love of the mortal woman whom you see before you to-day.

"At nightfall I must once more put on the form of a hateful dragon, and writhe and pant in that guise without the power of showing what I am. I must be the most hideous, the most terrifying of monsters.

"Yet come to-morrow to the castle, and when this great ugly beast rushes out upon you, fear not to take its head between your hands, and, lover-like, kiss it gently on

the lips. The moment you do so you shall be master of all the wealth of the place, and lord too of the happy maiden who will straightway stand before you freed once for all from the shape of the dragon."

How easy the task seemed to the Florentine as he promised the lady he would be there without fail next morning to do as she had directed! The fair one drew from her neck a glittering gem, pressed it into his hand, saying that it would serve to remind him that this strange story was not a dream, and having done so she glided from the room, nor could he follow her footsteps. A long time he wandered on the island before he turned back to his comrades, and over and over again he rehearsed to himself the morrow's meeting with the dragon. Had man ever been shown an easier way to win stores of gold, a fair country, and the most charming of brides?

It was still early next morning when our Florentine stole back from the ship across the pretty little island to the courtyard of the deserted castle. A strange, rattling sound at once caught his ears as he entered the gateway, and, thankful that he had armed himself fully, he grasped his sword, awaiting with fast-beating heart the appearance of his beloved lady in disguise. To steady his nerve he kept telling himself that whatever form she took, it could never be really frightful. But every second that he stood there he trembled the more. The harsh rattling changed to a grating sound, mingled with loud roars, and sometimes there arose a shrill note of anger, that again turned to a wail of despair. Suddenly all this noise ceased, and at the same moment the man saw the blood-shot eyeballs of an enormous beast glare straight at him from the darkness of the hall. So long did these hot

eyes rest upon him that his brain began to reel. "If she wears such a hideous form as this," he muttered, "surely she can never have been a hapless, innocent maid."

Then the beast raised its rasping cries anew, and its scales clattered on the paving stones, as it started to wind its way towards the man. In its teeth it held the mangled body of a goat, whose hair and blood were sticking about the awful mouth and the long forked tongue of the creature. Close up it crept to the man's side, dropped the torn parts of the goat at his feet, and raised its scaly throat till its sickening, hot breath blew right into his face.

It was too much for the Florentine. He shrieked with horror. Utterly forgetful of his purpose, he struck blindly at the monster with his sword, then turned, and rushed out of the gateway! The moan of despair that followed him was almost human; it rang out piteously, as if the Lady of the Land were again a troubled mortal. But the grisly dragon could not play the part of the winsome maid who yesterday had escaped for a few hours from that hateful shape. To check its moans it seized a great rock, and ground it savagely to powder between its jaws; then it crept pitifully down to the vaults, to mount guard for ever and a day over the countless treasure of gold, for never again did a man venture to face the monster that he might restore to the poor lady her true form.

What befell the Florentine that he could not, for love of the lady, have braced himself to return and lay his lips firmly on the dragon's mouth? After that breathless flight from the castle back to his comrades in their stout boat, he flung himself half senseless into the hold, and

when words came to his tongue they were wild and raving, so that none could gather what ailed him. For three days he lay calling on death to set him free; and on the third day death came, and his comrades laid his body to rest beneath the pomegranate-trees of Byzantium.

The Story of Rhodope

BETWEEN a range of lofty snow-capped mountains and the shores of the blue Mediterranean there stretches a certain fair land, sheltered alike from the cruel cold of winter and the scorching rays of the midsummer sun. There, long ago, dwelt a peasant race, simple and hard-working, who kept their thoughts upon their homely duties. None wandered through the mountain passes to find what lay beyond the snowy barriers, none ventured oversea ; they were content to spend their days working in the fields amongst their flocks and herds, their golden crops or leafy vine-rows. It was not only in outdoor work that they busied themselves. In the winter evenings the women would sit by their spinning-wheels, while the men carved soft poplar wood into bowls and spoons and ornaments of every shape. Just as their country knew neither extreme degree of heat or cold, so, as a rule, they themselves reached neither a high degree of wealth nor, on the other hand, sank to the depths of poverty. In most homes there was enough and to spare, so that when news was carried to the uplands that a foreign ship had cast anchor in the bay, it was thought no foolish extravagance to go and exchange the homespun cloth, carved bowls, wine or honey for the jewels and embroidered robes that the strangers might offer. These

treasures the thrifty peasants carefully laid by, only to see the light on wedding festivals and holidays.

In this land of modest plenty and prosperity lived one couple who, unlike their neighbours, grew poorer and poorer as time passed on. No one could say why, but nothing went well with them. The man worked diligently, his wife was skilful in all household matters, yet unforeseen misfortunes attended them year after year. The horses on the farm went lame, the cattle sickened and died, or the crops were ruined by heavy floods in the harvesting.

Not always, however, had the honest pair been so unfortunate. In their earlier married life they were as prosperous as any in the land, and had little more to desire than what was theirs already. One gift only they lacked —a child to gladden their quiet home, which, with all its comforts, seemed to them empty and cheerless since no young voice rang through its rooms. Often they would pray the gods to send them the blessing of children, though it were in exchange for all the gifts they now enjoyed.

For twenty years they hoped in vain, then when hope was almost dead, their hearts' desire was fulfilled, and a baby girl came to their home one mild March day. The goodman never forgot that afternoon, when the thrush's early spring song was heard from the budding lime-trees; the sky was a cloudless blue, and the blackthorn hedge a dazzling line of white blossom. But it was not for its beauty that he remembered the day in after years. He had fallen asleep in the hall when his morning work was over, and in his sleep a strange dream visited him. He and his wife seemed to be bending hand-in-hand over an exquisite little flower that grew in their garden. The day at first was bright with sunshine, but as they stood there the sky became clouded, and blinding rain and bitter

winds swept down upon them. In that bleak weather the fair flower grew to a tall young sapling, which still the old couple loved as before. Their love was mingled with wonder when they saw a bright flame blaze up around the cherished plant and hide it from them. Then weariness seemed to fall on the goodman and his wife, and in his dream he felt that they had died. The young tree still flourished after they were gone. It grew to a wonderful size, and on its branches hung golden crowns and glittering swords, great ships of war and stately temples, while the wind bore from it the noise of trumpet blasts and clanging armour and the sound of strange foreign tongues.

This dream perplexed the goodman, but did not vex him, for though he could put no certain meaning upon it, it somehow seemed to him a prophecy of great things to come. And the happiness that welled up in his heart as he rose from sleep and made his way among his thriving stock and well-filled barns, was perfected that evening when he looked for the first time upon his infant daughter's face.

In gratefulness for this most precious gift of Heaven, he held a splendid banquet on the morrow, loading his guests with handsome gifts, and making solemn sacrifice to the gods.

When the child was a year old a second feast was given in her honour, but this time, although the goodman was as liberal as he could be, there was less to offer from his fields and storehouses. His fortunes were clearly on the wane. From year to year, as the little golden-haired child grew and increased in beauty, so did her father's goods diminish, till at the time our story begins, when Rhodope saw her nineteenth summer, poverty and distress had crushed all joy out of her parents' hearts. The

burden of misfortune left its mark on the young girl no less than on the old people. There was no mirthfulness in Rhodope's voice, and seldom a smile on her grave, sweet face. She took her part in the humble duties of the house, doing her tasks deftly and untiringly; no complaint, no sigh to escape from grinding poverty, ever crossed her lips, yet it was plain her heart was not in the life she was living, and much her father wondered what thoughts lay behind her quiet brow and dreamy, grey eyes.

That she had no wish to find a new and more prosperous home in the circle of their wealthier neighbours, she had shown time after time in her refusal of the numerous suitors who had asked for her hand. The country people who knew her best, felt that there was a gulf fixed between Rhodope and themselves, and that, reason or no reason, she must always stand aloof from them.

One June evening father, mother, and daughter were sitting together in the great half-furnished hall, when the goodman fell to telling the others of an adventure he had had in his early days. It was a tale of pirates whom he and his comrades had once encountered in the bay.

"Ay, but we beat them in the end," he said. "We got their ship grounded on the beach, and then came our turn at plundering! The dragon's head that hangs above the door of Jove's temple in our market-town, was torn from the prow of their vessel, and the roof of that house of refuge on the shore was made of the stout oars that we carried off from our thieving friends. I warrant you their fine ship did not fly so fast across the bay by the time that we had done with her!

"But what pleased me most was our own share of the

booty—silver and gold, heavy armour, and princely clothing. We drew lots for it all. Oh, to see my portion of it to-night in this bare hall! Wine and honey I brought home, a noble helmet, half of it solid gold, and a purple robe stiff with embroidery—ah, my little girl, how well it would have set off thy pretty form!

"Of all that booty we have only two things left: first, the bow and arrows that hang yonder—they were too plain to fetch a good price, and for that reason I have kept them for my own use. And the other treasure, wife? It lies at the bottom of that oak chest, does it not? Light the taper for a moment, and we will show it to Rhodope."

With something akin to eagerness, the old people crossed the floor, glancing, as they went, to see if Rhodope shared their interest. But the girl hardly noticed their movements; she sat gazing through the open window at the stars that were fast lighting up the sky, and when she turned her eyes, it was only to watch some bat flitting past in the dark shadow of the house.

In the corner of the hall the goodman bent over the chest, on which his wife was throwing the light of a candle, and, turning over the coarse homespun webs that filled the greater part of their treasure-chest, he drew from the depths an embroidered silken cloth, and carefully unwrapped from its folds a pair of lady's shoes. But what shoes! Gems of priceless value glittered in the green and golden needlework, like flowers in an April meadow where the sunshine streams through the fresh, young blades of grass.

Rhodope came at her mother's call, and the sight of the wonderful treasures brought an unwonted colour to her face. She could not repress a cry of delight. Gently

she drew her hand over the jewelled shoes; then suddenly she turned away without a word, and, with set face, took up a piece of household work.

Her father at length broke silence. "Long have I kept these gauds, partly because no one in the land could offer me a fair price for them, partly because I ever trusted we should not be in such straits for long, but most of all because a sage once told me there lay in them the promise of better fortune. Alack! our needs are more pressing than ever; to meet them, I must part at last with my treasure.

"So, Rhodope, to-morrow thou shalt take thy way across the hill to Jove's temple, and bid the high priest say what he will give for these dainty shoes. Long he has wished them to deck his daughter's feet when she leads the sacrifice before the altar. Belike he will be ready to pay a generous price."

As he spoke Rhodope flushed hotly. Her mother saw her heightened colour, and drew the goodman's attention to it.

"Our daughter feels the shame of going as a beggar to the house where she might have gone as a bride. Ah! my girl, it was a sad mistake to look coldly on the high priest's son!"

"Hush! Hush!" cried the goodman. "We would not have Rhodope's bridal before she finds the right mate. Why, there's many a tale of how a fair maid remained unwed till a prince came to claim her. Eh, child, is that what thou'rt waiting for?"

His kindly, jesting words silenced his wife, but brought no smile to the girl's lips. For a moment Rhodope's eyes were raised to her father's; he saw her face was unmoved, and with a sigh for her ungirlish gravity, the old

man turned from her, and settled to his task of basket weaving.

Next morning Rhodope set off early on her journey to the temple, the jewelled shoes safely wrapped up, and hidden in her bosom. Like a queen she passed the groups of men and maidens busy in the vineyards; she gave a gentle answer to their noisy greetings, but did not stop to join in their talk. Her mother watched from the doorway as she glided swiftly on her way between the green hedgerows.

"Too proud to exchange a word with her neighbours," she murmured. "Faith, for all her poverty our child looks down on the highest in the land!"

Her mother was wrong, however. It was not pride, but simply want of interest in those around her, that kept Rhodope apart from the countryfolk. To-day her thoughts were, as usual, far away, dwelling on the dim chances that life held, and her grey eyes were full of trouble mingled with half-awakened hope. "Shall I never know content?" she murmured. "How I long to escape from the dull, spiritless life at home to some brighter place where I should feel that I am really living! Each day I pass is like the one that went before and the one that will come after it, irksome and uneventful. But oh! how thankless am I that I cannot rest happy amongst these good, kind-hearted neighbours! If all my life is to be spent here, why am I so little drawn to them?"

Musing thus, she had left the low ground, and slowly mounted uphill between banks of heath and red-trunked pines, till, having reached the summit, she now started on the bare downward road towards the temple. Suddenly she heard her name called in a clear voice from the rocks above, and as she stopped to listen, a well-

built young fellow, comely and honest, came bounding from stone to stone down the hillside.

"Rhodope," he cried eagerly, "art going to our house this morning? On business, thou sayest, with my father? He only comes home at nightfall, for he has been seafaring these two last days. But come, my mother will see thou hast a pleasant rest in the noonday heat, and in the evening, I pray thee, let me guide thee back across the hill. Thou knowest well my joy to be near thee, and my hope some day to win thy hand."

"I must go on to the temple," answered the girl firmly, "for I carry with me a small offering that my mother was fain to send this midsummer. But I must go alone. Nay, it is to save thee further pain that I now bid thee good-day. Never could I learn to love thee as a bride ought. Sometimes, methinks, I am in a dream, because I cannot share the love and joys that others feel. Forget my cold, hard face, and find thee a mate loving and light-hearted."

The truthfulness that rang in Rhodope's tones showed her suitor that further pleading was vain. Sadly he turned away from her, and she, touched by his sorrow, went onward with tears in her eyes.

At the foot of the hill lay a dark wood, and by its side a little lake that glistened like crystal beneath the fierce June sun. Rhodope stood a while on the bridge that spanned a rippling stream above the lake. She felt nothing now but the drowsiness of overpowering heat and the fatigue of her long morning's walk. Instead of continuing towards the temple, whose roof she could see above the distant trees, she wandered from the bridge to the riverside, and along its grassy banks to the cool shade of the woods, where she threw herself down beneath a

thick oak. From her bosom she drew the rich silk cloth that enfolded the jewelled shoes. These she unwrapped, and fingered lightly, smiling to see the gems sparkle when the sunlight touched them. She fell to wondering for whom the fair gift had been made, and what strange chance had brought it through the pirates' hands into her keeping. What a contrast such gear was to her own rough clothing! She smiled again to think that she, the poorest maid in the land, should carry the richest of court shoes. Then, lulled by the soft lapping of the water on its pebbly beach, Rhodope dropped asleep.

When she awakened there was her midday meal to take from her basket, and to eat, with a draught of cool, clear water from the stream. The marvellous shoes were glittering in the sunshine beside her, and as she finished her meal, she bent forward dreamily, raised one by the latchet, and no less dreamily slipped it and its neighbour on to her slim feet, from which she had cast off her own coarse sandals. Then she picked up what things she had thrown about her—her basket, sandals, and the silk wrapping—and wandered with dainty steps through the chequered woodland, where the shoes now gleamed in the shadow and now shone dazzlingly in the sun.

At length her steps led her to the edge of the lake. A gentle breeze was stirring the water into little ripples, that broke on a patch of white sand below the flowery meadow skirting the woods. Rhodope saw there could be no more lovely spot at which to bathe. She cast aside the shoes that had borne her thither, slipped off her dress, and glided far into the lake. The harsh cry of a bird startled her before she had played long in the cool, deep water, and, looking up, she saw a great eagle hovering against the rocky hillside. Then suddenly the bird came swooping

down towards the lake. She heard the rustle of his wings close by her, saw him light for an instant on the strip of sand, and rise again with something gleaming within his strong talons. He had borne off one of the fateful shoes!

Yes; she had lost irrecoverably the half of her father's treasure, and the poor little court shoe that still lay on the sand would bring nothing without its mate. There was no way, however, to make good the loss. When she had dressed again, she had to turn homeward with the single shoe, since it was no use now to visit the temple. In spite of her dismay, she almost laughed to think how once more fortune had been unkind to her house. "Yet," said she, "to-day's sorrow is often to-morrow's joy." And she beguiled her sadness on the long, homeward walk by weaving fancies of how the lost shoe might yet bring her wealth and happiness.

These pleasant daydreams, however, were chased away by the bitter words of blame which she heard from her mother's lips, when she told the old people of her mishap.

For long the poor woman chided her daughter angrily until tears choked her words. Then the goodman rose, and left his carving, over which he had been bending, silent as Rhodope herself. He stroked the girl's hand tenderly, and struggled to find something to say of good cheer.

"Thou wilt come to better days ere long, my little Rhodope," he murmured. "Heed not thy mother; she is over-vexed to-night." And although Rhodope still sat silent and unmoved, he talked on brightly, facing his difficulties bravely, and speaking of how he might best combat them, until he won his wife back to cheerfulness and smiles.

In spite, however, of his hopeful nature, there were times when the goodman despaired of ever hearing Rhodope speak freely to him. His sad, sunken eyes searched her face in vain for traces of softening; and yet, though he could not break through her reserve, he felt that in her own cold, unresponsive way she cared deeply for him. Only once did he gain his wish and hear her voice thrill with deep feeling. His wife had one day been urging him to pick the jewels from the remaining costly shoe, to sell them separately, and let the embroidered work in which they were set, be thrown into the fire.

"When the gems are torn out of the silk groundwork we will get a good price for them, and I can have the satisfaction of throwing the last rags of the hateful, mischief-bearing finery into the flames. I wish with all my heart it were as easy to make an end of the rags of Rhodope's pride and folly; she hardly condescends to speak to any of us nowadays."

A torrent of impatient, fretful words followed this beginning. Thankful when it was over and his wife had flung herself out of the room, the goodman crossed to Rhodope, who all the time had been quietly sitting at work with her spinning-wheel in a corner of the room. He stood watching her busy fingers for some minutes before he spoke.

"I have never been wise enough to choose the right road to fortune," he began simply, "and I cannot trust my own choice to-day. Rhodope, my child, should those jewels be torn out of the shoe, and sold as thy mother has advised? I am loth to destroy the last remains of our riches; and further, it may be that the seer was right when he said that the shoes gave promise of better things

to come. Didst ever hear of the dream I had before thy birth ? " he ended abruptly.

The girl's face showed a gleam of interest. " I have heard something of it," she answered as carelessly as she could, " but never paid much heed to the idle tale ; if thou hast any faith in it, I would fain hear thy dream once more."

Her father smiled. " Nay, nay ; I see thou knowest it every whit as well as I. Fate will come to our aid. Keep thou the shoe, daughter. We two believe that the dream pointed to a prosperous issue."

Then it was that Rhodope showed her father how dear she held him. She pushed aside her wheel, and threw her arms round the old man's neck.

" How kind and patient thou art, father ! " she whispered, " and I, how seemingly cold ! I cannot gladden thee with laughter and merry talk in this house of dead hopes. Ah ! if we could be set free to live another life ! "

From this it came about that the shoe was given into Rhodope's keeping, and that the goodman looked on her with greater love and trustfulness once she had opened her heart to him.

Twelve months went past, bringing some small measure of prosperity to the household. The old man joyed in the thought that his work might still change Rhodope's hard lot to one of comfort. He and his wife, he said to himself, were used to hardships, but their only child was young, and he longed to give her the happiness that youth expects. For her sake he worked early and late, and for love of her his toil seemed to him light.

Again it was a warm morning in June, again Rhodope was on the road from her home—this time, however, her steps were bent towards the market-town on the

shore. She was on her way to do some small errands, but before she had gone half way, she slowly turned, and sought her home again. What it was that forced her to return and take the long-hidden court shoe from her chest she could not have told. Was it some fragment of gossip that had floated to her ears from a passing wayfarer—of rich foreigners who had yesterday moored their galley in the harbour beyond the market-town? She told herself that to yield to the impulse was idle folly, but, all the same, she retraced her steps, and when she left her home the second time, she carried the shoe hidden in the folds of her dress.

On the road she saw numbers of countryfolk flocking to the seaport, apparently to chaffer with the foreign seamen, as was their custom. She overheard some talk about the new-comers and all their splendour, but her curiosity did not prompt her to join the stream of people who were flocking towards the market-place, and her errands were over before she thought of turning into the crowded square. When she did so, she saw that the priests were offering sacrifice at the altar of Juno's temple which stood in the centre of the market-place. Around the steps of the temple clustered a company of strangers, magnificently robed in gold and purple. Rhodope's eyes grew bright with wonder; awakened to a lively interest, she looked so lovely that the peasant-folk turned to gaze on her, and made way before her until she reached the open space at the temple. Then a look of glad surprise swept across her face, and added a new radiance. The courtly strangers, like the peasants, marvelled at her beauty; but Rhodope did not feel their intent gaze, for her eyes were bent on a tripod beside the altar. There gleamed the dainty shoe that she had lost a year ago!

She crossed to the steps, and fearlessly, yet quietly, addressed the foreign courtiers.

"Perchance ye seek a match for the jewelled shoe that lies yonder. I have it with me. A year ago I wore the two, and sore was my father's heart when I lost one of these gauds. 'Twill give him joy to hear that it has been found."

As she spoke, she drew the precious shoe from the folds of her dress, and laid it beside its mate. A cry of joyful wonder burst from the crowd when they saw her stand beside the tripod, the most lovely maiden in the land, dressed in her coarse grey robe, yet looking a very queen in her unconscious beauty.

One of the elder strangers, the chief ambassador, rose to make answer:

"Our quest is ended; we have found her in search of whom our king ordered us to roam the world. Hearken, O maiden! Well-nigh twelve months ago, the king of our far-distant country was doing sacrifice at the altar that stands outside our noblest temple, when a bird's shrill cry broke through the solemn silence of our worship, and looking upward we saw, as it were, a bright golden spark shoot through the azure; an instant later this wondrous shoe lay on the altar before the king. Some said that, straining their eyes, they saw an eagle soar in the blue sky far above us. Mayhap it was the bird bore us the treasure—I cannot say. This much I know, that our king was strangely moved at the sight of what had dropped from the heavens on to that holy place. For many days he was distraught, and would sit gazing at the pretty thing, until at length he called a number of us, his councillors and the like, placed the shoe in our hands, and bade us travel far and wide in quest of her who had once

worn it. 'For,' said our noble young king, 'I, who have never aforetime yielded to love, am fain to wed the maid. Aye; well I wot that she to whom it belongs is still unwed, and outshines all other maidens, as her little slipper surpasses the daintiest footgear of our court. By token that I found the trinket on the altar, I know that the gods have ordained me thus to find my queen.'

"Obedient to the royal orders, we fared from one land to another, sifting many false claims; but at last, thanks be to the gods! we have reached thy country, fair lady, have seen thy beauty, and have proof that thou art our master's appointed bride."

Rhodope had grown pale as she listened to these words that told of a new and splendid life awaiting her. Yet, thrilled though she was with the strange tidings, she soon regained her composure, and answered quietly that it was no light matter to leave her people and wed a mighty king whom she had never seen, but that, since so it seemed ordered by the gods, she would take the step, and accept the great fortune offered her. She then received the homage of the foreign courtiers, who each in turn knelt before her, lost in admiration of her beauty and her quiet simplicity.

When sacrifice for the success of their quest had been duly made, the strangers approached Rhodope to learn when she would be willing to set sail with them. She answered that it might be that same evening. "But," she added, "if I leave my home, my parents must come with me. We three have lived together through years of adversity, and I cannot enter upon a life of wealth and ease unless they share it also.

"Let me, I pray you, seek my father, that from my own lips he may hear of our changed fortunes. He hath

ever loved me tenderly, and till to-day I have had little cheer to offer him."

The courtiers willingly agreed that Rhodope should bring the old people with her, and she, eager to break the wondrous tidings to her father, turned from the market-place with its marvelling crowds, and hastened homeward, all her indifference swept aside by new feelings of joy and curiosity as to her future. Life, that a few hours ago had seemed so dreary, was now promising her every pleasure she could imagine.

The old man was tending the cattle in his yard when Rhodope stole up to his side, and startled him with the cry: "Father, beside thee stands a queen!" Then, as he looked in amazement at the girl's bright eyes and glowing cheeks, she went on to tell him the whole story of what had happened, and ended by urging him to make ready, and come with her.

Awed and trembling, he had listened to the tale. When it was finished, he found words with difficulty. "Dear heart," he faltered, "if 'tis good to thee, why it must please me too. And yet, Rhodope, this past year I have been thinking things were not going so badly with us, and that we might live to enjoy peace and prosperity of a sort in our old home. Shame on me, though, to let an old man's dreams of his own fireside spoil thy gladness!

"Aye, aye, if thou wilt have it so, we will all set out together. But bethink thee, my dear, 'tis but a passing fancy of thine to take us with thee. 'Twere better thou went alone to this strange palace; my love will go with thee, little one, and methinks that is enough."

But Rhodope would not listen to his excuses. Go he must, said she; how could she face life at a great court

if he were never to be at her side, comforting her when she felt lonely? And how could he live in the old house without her?

There was a tenderness in her voice and face that overcame him. He could only smile faintly; as usual, words failed him. Gently he turned from her, and went indoors in search of his wife. It seemed but a few minutes before the pair came out — her mother, to Rhodope's vexation, abashed in her presence as though the girl were already a crowned queen, her father with childlike devotion waiting upon her slightest wish. They had dressed as best they could in honour of the occasion—he, in an old scarlet suit, which in its better, and its owner's younger, years had done service on feast days; she, good soul, in what scraps of finery she could lay her hands upon. Rhodope still wore her plain grey robe when the little party walked to town; and though the foreigners, on meeting her, asked if she would not now let herself be decked as a queen, she refused, saying that she wished their king to see her as she was, a simple country maid.

"And now, my lords," she ended, "let us set sail speedily. If this is but a dream, I long even in that dream to feel the spray dashed in our faces and hear the steady beat of the oars on the deep waters."

A throng of town and country folk followed them to the harbour, raising many joyous and hearty shouts, that made the goodwife blush deeply, while her husband looked sadly alarmed at these unwonted attentions. The rapture of the hour entranced Rhodope: poverty would oppress her no more; she was saying farewell to a country which to her held nothing but sad memories; before her lay a voyage across that mysterious sea, where the setting sun was now running a path of gold up to the king's galley by

the quay; and at her journey's end she had the promise of love and bliss beyond all dreams.

She slipped her hand within her father's, and raised her eyes, shining with happy tears, as she whispered to him of the long years of happiness they would enjoy together. That she got no answer she hardly noticed; for they were already at the ship, and as they reached the gangway, she stepped in front of the old man, so that she could not have caught his words. With one hand held behind her, as though expecting her father's answering clasp, she wandered to the prow of the ship, and stood there, gazing intently on the tossing billows, without one backward glance on shore or gangway. Not even when the ropes were cast off, and the galley shot outward from the harbour, did she turn round. The sun slowly sank beneath the line of shimmering waters, the crimson evening turned cold and grey, and still Rhodope stood, lost in her day-dreams.

At length, as the curtain of night fell around her, she recalled herself to her new surroundings. She heard the sailors shout to one another at their work, the wind swept the galley on its way, and, spite of the knowledge that men and ship were alike in her service, she felt strangely in need of her father's familiar face and words to comfort her that night. To be reminded she was child rather than mistress was her desire. Anxiously she walked the deck, murmuring: "Where is he? Ah! if he is not with me how little care I for my fortune!"

He who had been spokesman in the morning came up to her, and heard her hurried inquiry for her father. In dismay he looked at her sad, questioning eyes and parted lips, that told of her anxiety.

"Oh, my lady," he gasped, "dost thou not know that

he has stayed behind? I thought he had surely told thee how that he was fain to live out his days with his goodwife in his own land, in his old home, and how he could not bring himself to move amongst strangers or dwell in a king's palace. Tell me, my mistress, shall we put back to harbour, and send word that he must join us?"

Rhodope felt her limbs trembling; the answer "Aye" was on her lips, but she checked the word before it was uttered. Then in another minute her strength returned; she accepted what Fate had ordained, and in a low, quiet voice she bade the courtier let the ship go on its way. She saw now the fulfilment of her father's dream, that by the will of the gods, while her life blossomed into wondrous splendour and prosperity, her parents' days must end in the old homestead where their lot had been cast. And the truth of the goodman's words that morning was borne into her mind: his love, and that alone, could go with her to her new and princely home.

The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon

EAST of the sun, west of the moon!

All day long Gregory's fishing boat had been flitting hither and thither upon the broad Norwegian firth, so belike it was the memory of that long day's cruise that led him at night-time to dream of a country whose direction was so quaint and puzzling. And as the dream lingered in his mind next morning, and pleased him, idle though it was, he took pains to turn it into verses, which many a generation has listened to within the halls and cottages of Norway.

Here is the story which came to him in his dreams.

A well-to-do husbandman in a certain part of Norway farmed his own land with the help of his two elder sons. He had a third son, but this John, although a tall, strong lad, was of little use upon the farm. Many an hour he trifled away at the fireside in winter, and still more in the woods and orchard when summer came round. Whatever he might make of his handsome face, his dreamy wits, the store of old rhymes and such other scraps of learning as were his, he would never prove a good farmer, said his father. "Let John go his own ways," the goodman would exclaim; "he is not worth training on my fields!"

One summer morning the farmer went to look at a

meadow where he expected his rich crop of hay would soon be ready for the scythe, but, alas! a melancholy sight met his eyes when he looked across the wattled fence—a great patch of the meadow grass was trampled down, so that no mower could possibly pass his scythe through the tangle.

The farmer came home with a frown on his brow. "Thorolf," he cried to his eldest son, "to-night you must take your crossbow, and lie in watch amongst the hawthorns that skirt the south meadow. Some one has come by night and beaten down the ripening grass; whether it be an enemy of ours—who would have thought we had any!—or a mischievous vagrant, he shall be well punished if he plant foot within the meadow a second time!"

So Thorolf went out after supper to keep watch over the meadow, but what with his hard day's work, and a very comfortable meal at the close of it, he was not long in falling into a doze, and from that he passed into a deep sleep that lasted well into the morning. When he arose from his bed of wood-sorrel he found that the long grass was trodden down in fresh places, and he was obliged to go home and own, to his father's chagrin, that matters were now worse than ever.

The next evening Thord, the second son, was sent in place of Thorolf, but when he returned to confess with downcast face that he had done no better than his elder brother, and that by this time there was only one corner of the meadow left untrodden, the farmer altogether lost his temper, and rated them both soundly, calling them good-for-nothing, slothful young fellows.

Hearing his brothers called names that were generally bestowed upon him alone, John, who was strolling past the group, stopped, and stretching himself lazily: "I am

truly sorry you have not done your work better, my brothers," he said, with a pretence at reproach in his voice, "for now our good father will insist upon sending me out to take a turn at night watching. Well, well, father, you need vex no more; by this time to-morrow I shall have found out where the mischief comes from."

"You!" cried his father indignantly. "Do you think you can succeed where Thorolf and Thord have both failed? If you find out the offender it will be the first time in your life, my boy, that you have shown yourself worth your keep. Go and try the post to-night, by all means, but I cannot say that I expect to learn more from you than from my other brave watchers."

Quite unmoved by his father's scoff, John went calmly on his way. He spent the day in sleep—a wise enough preparation for night work—and when the time came for him to go on watch, he went down to the meadow without bow or knife in his hand. "If I have to deal with a rough set of men, they would soon make an end of me should I draw bow upon them," thought he, "and still less use have I for weapons, if the trespassers prove, as methinks they will, to be gentle fairy-folk."

Amongst the hawthorn bushes he found a hiding-place close to the untrodden part of the hayfield. Hour after hour passed, and yet no visitant, either of earth or fairy-land, set foot upon the meadow. The dawn broke, a light breeze stirred the long grass, and one by one the birds in the wood began to twitter shyly. Up to this time John had kept wide awake, but now drowsiness would have overpowered him had he not heard a strange, rushing sound of wings overhead, and, parting the boughs that screened his face, he watched breathlessly to see what manner of bird might alight. Slowly seven white

swans came circling towards the meadow, and dropped on the dewy grass only a stone's cast from where he lay crouching beneath the hawthorn. He was ready to raise a shout, and frighten them from the place, if need be; but so long as they did no harm to his father's crops, he took pleasure in watching them close beside him, bridling, and preening their snow-white feathers.

Satisfied that they were moving about on the edge of the field where there was nothing to spoil, he closed his eyes for a few moments. A sudden hush made him start, and he glanced round to see if the stately birds were still before him. No, they were not; but on the grass stood seven maidens, as fresh and lovely as the white feathers that they had cast down at their feet! One of them was standing with her face turned away from the hawthorn brake, so that John saw but the ripples of her golden hair, over which the morning breeze was playing lightly; yet as he hearkened to the sweet notes of her voice, his heart beat wildly, and he cried to himself that she was the fairest of the fays, and the queen of his heart now and for ever! And when at length she turned, and he eagerly scanned her features, one glance told him that he had judged aright by her voice, for indeed the sweetness of her face passed all imagining.

A while the seven sisters stood murmuring softly to one another, glad, it seemed, to indulge in talk when they regained their voices along with their human form; then, as if to enjoy all that they might, before they again put on their feathery dress, they danced lightly and merrily over the long, dewy grass, and laughed for joy as they frolicked carelessly in the farmer's dearly prized meadow. Not for worlds would the watcher amongst the hawthorns have disturbed them. Every smile, every word, and

every movement of the swan-maiden whom he had singled out for his love, made his heart thrill with happiness. But ah! what would he do when she flew away with her sisters, and he was left to mourn, perchance never to see her again? The swan-skin which she had cast aside, lay within his reach. If he hid it from her, at least she would have to speak a word to him before she could recover it and soar away, thought he, and, yielding to the impulse, he stretched out his hand stealthily, and drew the skin into his nest beneath the thorn-trees.

The sun, that had shot its first level beams across the meadow when the maidens started upon their dance, now rising high in the heavens, warned them that it was no longer safe to linger where men might soon be passing to their day's work. In a long line they tripped back, one after another, and slipped on their snow-white swan-skins; but when she upon whom John's eyes were bent, came to look for hers, a sharp cry of distress rang from her lips —the downy wrap was not to be found! In vain she searched for it, in vain her sisters flitted through the tangled grass, looking for what lay hidden securely in John's keeping beneath the hawthorn boughs. Every minute the sun beat more strongly upon wood and field, a stern reminder to the swan-maidens that fate forbade them to remain longer upon earth. The six fair white birds clustered around their poor sister, striving without avail to comfort her, and she, softly stroking their plumes with one hand in silent farewell, hid her tearful eyes with the other as they unwillingly prepared to take their flight. So long as they were with her, she tried to conceal her anguish, but when she heard them rise on the wing and soar away far above the meadow, her grief broke out wildly; her whole body was shaken with sobs, and the

tears splashed down on the grass through the slim fingers that hid her face.

A sound of footsteps amongst rustling twigs startled her even in the midst of her distress, and in fear of being seen by mortal eyes, she fled across the trampled ground, and cowered low down in the beaten grass, like a wounded bird that lies in terror of its destroyer. The eyes that met hers, however, were not such as could inspire fear; they were almost as startled and timid as her own. Moved by her grief, John had come to own, in shame, that he had stolen the swan-skin; and though at first the maiden had trembled at his coming, she saw now that he was looking tenderly upon her, and she divined that it was love for her, and a longing to keep her beside him, that had prompted his theft. "Ah! do you think," she cried passionately, "that because you have been cruel enough to hide my swan-skin, and keep me bound to earth, I can love you and live happily amongst mortal men?" Wisely she worked upon his feelings, begging him, since he did not wish to do her harm, to win her grateful thanks by letting her fly away safely. "You make it too hard for me to set you free, maiden," he answered; "every word from your lips, every glance from your bright eyes so enthralls me that I cannot bear to let you go."

"Alas!" she sobbed, "what can I do? I would fain listen to your love, but I must not dwell with mortals upon earth; it would be death alike to you and to me if you kept me beside you any longer. Will you not come with me, and share our life in our far-distant country? Nay, nay; it would be too much to ask you to leave your home and your kinsfolk for my sake. Let me bid you farewell, then; be wise, and yield to fate; let me soar away in my swan-skin, and do you turn back and dwell

" She saw that he was looking tenderly upon her " 220

contentedly in your own land, knowing that you have won my heart by your gentleness, your pity, and your love."

"Nay," said he eagerly; "I will not let you go alone. Take me with you, I pray, and let me live for ever in your far country, for worthless would I count my life on earth if I should never look again on your dear face."

So the swan-maiden, though she doubted the wisdom of his choice, suffered him to lead her to the shade of a neighbouring beech-wood, where, taking from him her white swan-skin, she made ready for their strange journey. First, she set a gold ring with a dark green stone upon his finger as a seal to their love; then, bidding him lie down on the withered leaves beneath a beech-tree, she laid a spell upon him, and immediately his eyes grew dim, and sleep stole over his senses.

A long, long time passed until at length his eyes opened upon a new world. His love stood beside him in a beautiful land, whose sunshine and flowers were as unmatched by what he had hitherto known, as was the girlish beauty of her upon whom the pink blossoms were now falling from the trees. "My land and yours!" she cried, following his bewildered gaze with a smile.

"You look too grave, sweetheart; does it not please you well?" But the only reason why the earth-born stranger looked so grave was that he was striving to recall something of the gloom and trouble that overshadowed mortal life, so that he might the better gauge the joy of his new home, where all was unclouded peacefulness and bliss.

Three harvests had been gathered in his father's fields when John began to think wistfully of the life that had once been his in Norway. It was not that he was dis-

satisfied with the fairyland in which he dwelt, or that his love was growing cold towards the lady of his heart, but more and more he yearned to share again his brothers' lot and to see how things sped with them. He fancied that he showed no sign of uneasiness, however, so the swan-maiden's question surprised him when one morning she asked: "What burden lies heavy upon your spirit? Do you fear that I have hid from you the knowledge of coming trouble, and that our careless, happy years are soon to have an end? Yes; you are right. I have said nothing of what I foresaw, because so long as we could close our eyes to it, there was no call to disturb our peaceful days, but now, alas! our parting is at hand."

John turned to her anxiously. "Parting?" said he. "Why should we part?"

Then the swan-maiden told him that fate willed he should return to his own country for a time, and that their future happiness depended solely upon whether he could keep the commands that must be laid upon him whilst he revisited his old home. "Let not a sigh for me escape your lips," she warned him solemnly, "for were you to call on me, I would have to appear beside you upon earth, and ill would it be for both of us if I were seen of mortals. Yet though you must not ask me to join you, I have power to call you back, should I need you sorely. Every evening you shall go to the meadow where you first saw me, wait there an hour, and if I would recall you, I will send a sign. Rest contented, nor strive to return until you are bidden of me, and above all, sweetheart, let no one know the story of our love." Then, telling him that he must not delay his departure, she led him to the spot where he had first awakened in her fairyland, and, bending over him with sad and tender farewell, she soon sang him to sleep be-

neath a mystic spell. He knew that he was being wafted farther and farther away from her, for her sweet voice, half choked with sobs, grew fainter each moment, and before his eyes there flitted a countless number of forms, unlike what he had ever seen either on earth or in fairy-land—birds of gorgeous plumage, giant trees that seemed like overgrown ferns, dim-eyed beasts, and unthought-of creatures that aped mankind. By and by he became unconscious, as on his former journey, and when he awakened he was lying in a thick wood, where he had spent many an hour bird-nesting in his boyhood. He was again in Norway!

How well he remembered every step that he took towards his father's house! When he reached open ground he saw the farm-roofs, studded with bright house-leeks, rising above a distant clump of trees, and at the same time he heard the horn summoning the field workers to dinner—a summons which they were not slow to answer, for every one was at table when John, a few minutes later, came up to the porch, his footsteps unnoticed amid the general clatter of tongues and dishes. He listened anxiously until he caught the sound of his father's voice, for he had feared that by this time the old man might be dead; but now, reassured by the cheerfulness that reigned in the homestead, he stepped forward briskly, took the horn from its peg beside the door, and wound it, as a stranger might, to announce his arrival.

The honest farm-folk stared in amazement when they saw upon the threshold a stranger whose dress was a mass of gold from head to foot. No one recognised John; even his father thought he was a nobleman, and, rising up, he courteously invited him to rest in the hall and share their simple meal, if he were so inclined.

John thanked him, and, feeling that it was not a fit time at which to declare himself, he answered that he would be glad to rest with them a while, for he was a stranger in those parts, and, having had the mishap to lose his horse that morning, he had been forced to walk till he was footsore. Satisfied with the explanation, the goodman gave him a place at the head of the table, and treated him with the utmost honour; but his mother, on the other hand, was less convinced by his story, and watched him narrowly, wondering why he should so strongly remind her of her youngest boy, whom, in spite of his waywardness, she had loved most tenderly, and whose sudden disappearance had caused her untold suffering.

Meanwhile John had been taking note of all who were at table. Father and mother, his two brothers Thorolf and Thord, and most of the old servants were still there. A few new faces there were, one of which he looked at with interest—by his younger brother's side sat a handsome woman, whom he rightly guessed to be Thord's bride. For one glance that John gave this Thorgerd, she shyly returned two, for she was much charmed by the good looks and the pleasant manners of the stranger.

When dinner was over the men returned to their work in the fields; but before they left, the master of the house begged his guest to rest in the farmhouse as long as he pleased, and John answered that he would be glad to stay a while. The women were sent to their tasks by their mistress, who gave her orders to her young daughter-in-law, Thorgerd, amongst the others. Unwillingly Thorgerd rose from the table, and, throwing a last glance towards John, left him and his mother alone in the hall. But not yet did the goodwife dare to ask this handsomely

dressed stranger the question that was trembling on her lips. If he really were her son he would soon show it, she believed ; and instead of leading him to talk, she slipped out of the hall, and prepared to test him by a simple little device. She sent a maid to throw down an armful of clothes on the settle close to which the stranger was resting, and the maid having done so, John was again left alone in the hall. His eyes fell upon the bundle of clothes beside him, and he immediately recognised them to be a masquerader's quaint cloak and hood which he had worn four years ago at a Yule-tide gathering.

The whole scene came back to him : the snowy ground, the figures around him, and the song that they sang that evening :

> " News of a fair and a marvellous thing,
> *The snow in the street and the wind on the door.*
> Nowell, nowell, nowell we sing !
> *Minstrels and maids, stand forth on the floor.*"

He rose dreamily, threw off his gold-embroidered coat, and, wrapping himself in the spangled finery, he paced the floor singing verse after verse of the old carol. His mother stole back to the hall, and saw what she had expected—her own boy, recalled by the memories of a past night, breaking into songs of the countryside, and hugging the quaint cloak about him as he wandered up and down the room in his dreamy fashion as of old.

He ran towards her as he caught sight of her loving eyes fixed upon him. " Mother," he cried, looking into the wistful face, and kissing her fondly, as he had done when he was but a boy, " mother, your ne'er-do-well has come back, and glad am I that I may yet be a joy to you. I have come to see you but for a time, for my new home is

far distant, and ere long I must return to it. But if I give you news of how I have fared these three years, tell me in return all that has come to pass amongst you in that time."

So mother and son sat and talked hand-in-hand until the others came in at nightfall, when John rose, and told them that he was indeed the lad who had disappeared three summers ago. Mindful of the warning given him by the swan-maiden, he told no one, not even his old mother, the true story of his fairy love, but spoke of how he had met people from a far country the morning that he had been on watch beside the south meadow, and how they had taken him with them, and, settling in their midst, he had fared surpassingly well, and was now wedded to a lovely princess.

There was great rejoicing amongst the simple folk when they learned that the handsome stranger was the idle young dreamer whose chances of fortune had seemed so slender in the past. His elder brothers welcomed him without the least touch of jealousy ; while the goodman, for the first time in his life, felt proud of his youngest son, and his only regret was that John would have to quit Norway again, when the seamen who had brought him on this visit should return to take him back to his new home.

And now John had got his desire. He was free to enjoy life on his father's farm as of old ; but just as he had wearied for the pleasure of that rough life when he was shut off from it in the swan-maiden's country, so now that he was again upon earth, what would he not have given to see his love at his side ? He began to grieve sadly, and the people in the homestead noticed that he came home more unhappy each evening from his solitary

walk to the south meadow. They would fain have discovered why he took his nightly walk alone ; but he did not encourage them to talk about his affairs, and, saving Thorgerd, no one ventured to question him. His sister-in-law, however, had fallen hopelessly in love with him, and she did everything in her power to win his heart and learn the secrets that lay buried there. She would slip out to join him on his way back from the meadow at nights, when he, love-lorn and despairing, sometimes wondered if he might not tell the story of his woe to this soft-eyed friend who was so anxious to listen to his talk and try to comfort him.

It was only by remembering how earnestly the swan-maiden had entreated him to keep the secret of her love from mortal ears, that he withstood his longing to unburden himself to Thorgerd. And yet, although he never willingly revealed the reason of his sadness, there came at length a night when rash words escaped him, and brought grievous trouble upon him and his beloved.

On Christmas Eve the snow lay thick upon the ground, and heavy grey clouds were resting on the hillsides, to be ever and again swept along by a bitingly cold wind that howled around the old farmhouse as John set out on his customary evening walk to the meadow. The chill and dreary look of the country was in keeping with his sense of misery, and in a sudden fit of despair he cried aloud when he reached the spot where he had first seen the swan-maiden ; " Come to me, sweetheart ! I cannot live without you. Come to me now ! "

Would a fair white swan float down towards him from that cold, wind-swept mass of clouds ? No ; no answer came either by sight or sound. A long time he waited breathlessly, trembling at his rashness in having called

his beloved ; but the sky grew darker and darker, night closed in, and at last he realised that it was useless to wait longer. Bitterly reproaching his love for having deceived him in saying that she would come at a sigh from him, he turned, and strode homeward. A slender woman wrapped in a grey cloak stood waiting him as he entered the courtyard ; here, surely, was his swan-maiden ! Not a word could he cry, for joy and surprise overmastered him. He saw her glide up to him, and felt her soft, warm hand slipped into his. Then he stammered, "Oh, sweetheart, I have done no wrong, have I ? I called on you because I could no longer endure life without you."

A gentle voice answered that in her eyes he could do no wrong, and that to know he loved her was the one desire of her heart. But when he recognised the speaker, John dropped her hand quickly, for it was not his swan-maiden, but Thorgerd, who had come to meet him. Forgetting that there was a listener beside him, he cried recklessly : "O my beloved, do you care for me no longer ? Have I been indeed deceived ? Yet think not that my love can fail like yours ; while life lasts, never shall I cease to mourn for you ! "

Thorgerd did not interrupt him. Silently she walked beside him across the snowy courtyard to the hall-door, then, stopping abruptly, she asked him in a smothered voice who it was that he had hoped to see that night—was it not she herself ? She had loosened her grey cloak, and the light from the open door sparkled upon her golden hair and on the rich, embroidered robe which she wore in honour of the Christmas feast. A more beautiful woman could hardly have been found in all Norway ; but John had not a thought to give her, and cared not though his words pained her deeply. He answered that the lady-love whom

he longed to see was afar off. "Ah, if she would but cross this threshold to-night!" he sighed despairingly; and as Thorgerd heard him, she turned away sullenly, knowing that there would never be a place for her in his heart, and wild with shame and anger that she had vainly betrayed to him the secret of her love.

The great Yule-tide feast was being celebrated in the hall, and every one belonging to the homestead was there, John and Thorgerd among the rest; she, trying to bury her chagrin in forced merriment, he, weary at heart, still thinking of his lost love. It was late in the evening before he could rouse himself to join in the revelry around the table; but at length he made the effort to bear his part, and, rising to his feet, he was about to call some well-known toast, when a horn rang out clear, though far away across the fields, and at the sound of the blast the words died upon his lips. Again the horn was wound, this time louder than before, and John grew pale and trembled at the thought of what it might betoken. When for the third time the blast was heard, now close at hand, he could neither speak nor move, and the other men snatched up their weapons, not knowing what enemy might be upon them at that late hour; another minute, and the arms were dropped, for the door opened, and upon the threshold stood a gentle lady in robes white as the snow that lay about her feet—John's true love had come to him!

"Joy and peace to the house," she said in her pretty, birdlike voice, looking round the smoky hall with a bright inquiring glance. "I have come to join my loved one. Will you give me your welcome, John?"

How timidly, and yet with what rapture, did John come forward to whisper his joy at seeing her; how proudly

he led her before his father and the others, telling them that for his sake his bride had come a far journey to his home! If any one had been inclined to doubt the story of John's fortunes, there was none now but believed it every whit, when they saw his mate, whom no princess in their country could equal in sweetness and beauty. The evening that had begun so gloomily for John, had now become a season of bewildering joy, and he watched with delight how his beloved won the hearts of all at table. She spoke gently and lovingly to the goodman and his wife, wishing them many long years of happiness together; she joined in the mirth around her, and when a shade of doubt and anxiety crossed John's face, she smiled upon him gaily, as if to assure him that he must not regret the rash words which brought her to his world. "Let us be glad together for at least one night," she whispered; and so, in spite of secret misgivings, he smiled back to her, and gave himself up to the enjoyment of her sweet presence.

Hours after, when the banquet was over and the house wrapped in slumber, a poor, heart-broken little swan-maiden arose, and bent tearfully over John, who was lying fast asleep. "Farewell, dearest," she sobbed as she drew the gold ring off his finger. "Alas that we should have to part! Yet so it must be, because in your impatience you called me to appear amongst mortals. How mournful henceforth will your life be, and oh! how desolate mine, when I go to dwell in that land far beyond the world's end, *east of the sun and west of the moon*! Ah! love, would that these words might reach you in your sleep, and sink deep into your memory, so that you might afterwards arise and seek me in that home of hapless lovers, whither no one has yet journeyed of his own will!"

Then she turned, and stole softly downstairs to the deserted hall, and out into the white world of snow on which the moon was pouring its silver light. But where her path led, no one might ever know, for when John discovered his loss in the morning, and ran out, wild with grief, to try and trace her steps, he found that the snow had fallen afresh, and not a print remained to tell of her passing.

In speechless anguish, he fled from his old home before any of the household was astir, and all day he wandered aimlessly through the countryside until at nightfall he reached a small seaport. He had but one thought, and that was to roam the wide world, so long as life lasted, in search of his beloved. But where was he to turn his steps? He was haunted by the memory of a phrase—part of a forgotten dream, he fancied—which told of a dreary land where the love-lorn dwell, far removed from earth's joys; but, try as he might, he could not recall the exact words which might help him upon his well-nigh hopeless quest.

Having determined to seek his lost one overseas, he had to wait many weeks at the little seaport until the wintry weather gave place to a mild springtide, when the sailing boats could safely leave the harbour. At length, one fair March evening, he went on board the first ship that was southward bound that season, and although he had nothing to guide him in his wanderings, he felt it a comfort at least to be moving onward to a new country. His dreams that night were of travels, untried and perilous, yet full of promise, and when he awakened in time to see the sun rise while the moon was still shining faintly, the words that had haunted his memory since that sad Christmas night, suddenly flashed upon him, and he cried :

"*East of the sun and west of the moon!* That is the land where I shall find my swan-maiden. But oh! my sweetheart, how am I to reach you there?"

He looked up gratefully at sun and moon, which together had recalled the phrase that henceforth was to guide his steps, and little else he thought of, for the rest of his voyage; but how he could journey to that unknown abode of the love-lorn. When his ship reached the shores of England he disembarked at the easterly port of Dunwich, and since he could expect no news of foreign lands in the quiet country villages around, he turned his steps towards London, where he might hear talk amongst the seamen on the wharfs about strange journeys—perchance of what lay beyond the world's end.

Sometimes when he stopped for the night at a hostel or abbey, he would relate his own sad love-story (always pretending, however, that it was the tale of another man), in the hope that some listener might rise to tell something more about that land of exiled lovers. But though his audience heard him with deep interest, and told him that no minstrel could have given them a merrier tale, yet never a man had a word to add about the country of which the poor wanderer was fain to hear. In time he reached London, and went down to the riverside, where he mixed with all sorts of travellers and heard indeed of many a curious voyage; but to that land east of the sun and west of the moon no one seemed ever to have journeyed, or at least no one had ever returned from its shores. Then he resolved that he would begin travelling himself, and from that time onward he sailed from one quarter of the globe to another, till many years had been spent in fruitless search that brought him no nearer to his heart's desire.

Once he returned to his father's house in Norway, but when he learned that his mother was dead, the ties which bound him to his kinsmen were severed; and after he had seen his father and brothers, strong and hearty as ever, and Thorgerd no less beautiful, he bade them farewell hastily, for the place reminded him too sadly of his swan-maiden, and scarcely could he restrain himself from falling down in a passion of tears to kiss the threshold on which her slender white feet had rested that fateful Christmas night.

Reckless of dangers, he continued to roam through many countries until he found himself in an Eastern land in the company of certain traders who were preparing for a cruise to far-distant shores, where they expected to find great abundance of gold and precious stones. At his request they took him aboard, and presently they set out upon their voyage with every prospect of success.

Time passed, however, and the land which the sailors expected to have sighted was nowhere visible; day after day they sailed on, and still nothing but sea and sky met their gaze; then seamen and merchants grew alike disquieted, while, strange to say, John felt calmer and more hopeful than his wont.

Standing one evening by the prow, he gazed at the setting sun with hopes so bright that he was almost afraid to harbour them in his heart. While the sun dropped upon the western horizon he saw the sickle of the new moon shining aloft; and at the sight of sun and moon he pondered on the course he wished to keep—east of the sun, west of the moon, and something seemed to whisper to him that this evening he was approaching his long journey's end. He cared not that the sailors were anxiously watching a heavy bank of grey clouds that lay

upon the water's edge in the east ; the threatening storm had no terrors for him, and at night-time he lay down and slept, while the others, open-eyed, and shuddering at the great waves that rose like mountains above the ship's side, crouched together in fear of instant death. The night grew darker and darker, and the sea tossed the frail timber-built vessel, as though it were made of paper, now to the crest of a huge billow and again down into a trough at the very roots of the waves. And still John slept, until a great wave swept over the deck and hurled him against the mast, around which he had the presence of mind to fling both arms, so that he escaped being washed overboard. Whether others, like himself, were still clinging to the wreck, he could not see, but it was soon plain that all were alike doomed, for the ship was rapidly filling with water. On and on he was swept through the billows, while through his mind rushed crowded memories of his loved swan-maiden; and horror of the shipwreck and the raging black sea was lost in strangely peaceful dreams of her for whose sake he was even then drifting to an untimely end. Then the wrecked vessel reeled beneath a last, violent shock, the waves met with a roar above his head, and John sank down quietly into depths where he felt and knew no more.

But all was not over. The swan-maiden's lover awoke to find himself on a sunny stretch of sand where the green sea rippled gently at his feet, without a trace of the storm that had raged the night before. A strange contentment filled his heart as he thought of all the toils and perils he had safely passed through ; surely, said he, his life would not have been preserved, had he not been destined to see his beloved once again. For a little while he lay at ease,

basking in the warm sunshine, and wondering vaguely what country this might be, which had all the charm of earth's fairest places and was yet unlike any land that he had ever visited.

At length he rose, and with a last gaze upon the ocean, which he was dimly conscious he would not cross again, he passed inland over daisied slopes, where never a building of any kind nor a human being was to be seen.

From the sea-level the ground rose first to grassy hills and then to an unbroken line of lofty, rugged mountains, which, having no passes, would have to be scaled by the stranger who wished to make his way to the valley beyond. John stopped to take his first refreshment in this lonely outland, from an apple-tree on whose boughs blossoms and delicious ripe fruit hung side by side, and then he pressed uphill until the sun set, and he was forced to wait till dawn before he gained the heights from which he hoped to look down into the heart of the country. So early indeed was he afoot next day that the sun had but risen when he reached the summit. Looking eagerly inland, he saw beneath him a wonderfully beautiful vale, in which the hand of man had been at work, cultivating fruits and raising pleasant homesteads by the side of the stream that flowed between the low meadows. On the slopes immediately beneath the bare rocky brow of the hill, lay terraced vineyards and rich wheat fields; lower down, there were patches of orchards which skirted the fertile meadows on the level ground. Cottages and trim farmhouses were there in plenty, and as John gazed down upon the valley, which the sun was now flooding with a golden haze, he fancied that the happy folk who dwelt there must be sheltered from all the woes that afflict mortals whose lot is cast in less pleasant places.

From this restful scene his eyes turned to the wan ghost of the moon, which hung low above the hills facing him, and then, feeling the sun waxing warm upon his shoulders, he gave a sudden shout of joy: "*East of the sun and west of the moon*! At last, at last I have reached the land where my loved one is to be found!"

He looked to find a path from the rocky ridge down to the hollow, and, seeing that it was impossible to descend the steep cliffs at the point where he stood, he made his way along the crest of the hill for some little distance, until the valley beneath him, which had at first been but narrow, widened out to a great expanse of sheltered lowland, through which the river swept in a wide bend. Far away upon the curve of the river, gleamed the golden roofs of a castle, and at the sight of it John's heart beat fast, for there, surely, was the abode of the love-lorn! Presently the hillside become less precipitous, and, climbing down the rocks, he reached the grassy slopes, where men were afoot, making ready for their day's work in field and orchard. They were a well-thriven race, comely for the most part, and of honest appearance, but never had John seen such grave faces as they wore. They showed no interest in the stranger; if their sad eyes happened to meet his, they gave him no second glance, and none answered his greeting. On his way to the palace he hailed in turn a woodman, an elderly dame, riding upon a mule, and a young boy, who was walking by her side, but for all the notice that they took of his questions, they might have been dead folk. Indeed, so much did he doubt whether they were living men and women, that when he passed a group of girls filling their jars with water at the palace fountain, he laid his fingers lightly upon the soft hand of a maid to feel if there were any warmth in it.

Yes; the blood coursed freely in her veins, but his touch could not rouse her from the indifference in which she, like the others in this enchanted land, seemed to be irretrievably lost.

Through groups of servants, men-at-arms, and gentlefolk, he passed from the court to the hall, where all were streaming in to their early meal without a summons from either bell or horn. He stood aside and watched the dumb figures take their places until only one seat remained empty, and that was the throne in the centre of the dais. Then in his sea-stained, tattered clothes, he strode barefooted, past the handsomely dressed knights and ladies, and seated himself in the chair of honour. Just as no one had questioned his right to enter the palace, so no one showed either displeasure or surprise at his taking his seat upon the throne. The meal was taken in unbroken silence; unasked, the servants brought John all that he could wish; and then, smiling at the absurdity of a poor wanderer like himself having been entertained so royally, he wandered out of the hall before the others, and turned his steps along a cool cloister.

A maid brushed closely past him, walked to the end of the paved way, and disappeared through a door in the wall. The disappointment which John had felt when he saw that his swan-maiden was not amongst the people in the hall, gave place suddenly to overwhelming excitement. The door in front of him led, without doubt, to the women's courts, and there, if anywhere in this enchanted castle, he would find his lost one. With bated breath he hastened to raise the latch, and stepped into a court which was shaded by pink-blossomed trees and cooled by the playing of a fountain in the midst. There in the centre of a busy

group of girls, bending silent-tongued over their spinning, sat his dearly loved swan-maiden!

Her face was as joyless as those around her; she had no smile upon her lips, and her eyes were heavy and downcast, but except for her sadly changed expression, her beauty was as exquisite as ever. John's joy unnerved him, and, too faint to move, he stood for a time and feasted his eyes upon that sweet form which for many a long year he had seen only in dreams. When would she raise her face, he wondered; and would her eyes brighten when they fell upon him? With trembling limbs he crossed to where she sat listlessly working at a piece of embroidery. Like all others banished to this land of hopeless love, she was deaf to any sound, and even when his glad, faltering words of greeting were uttered, she did not notice the man who stood before her; only, as if she were troubled by a dream, she gave a little start and clenched her white hands.

"Sweetheart," he sobbed, "surely your love has not grown cold? Ah! look into my eyes, I pray you, and behold your true lover, who all these years has found no rest nor happiness without you." Then he poured into her unheeding ears the story of his love, from the morning when she won his heart in the meadow by his old Norwegian home, on to the late sad years when he had roamed the whole world in his distress. "Have not we both been sorely punished for my folly and impatience in calling you to join me amongst mortal men?" he pleaded. "Through all those bitter years I have never ceased to believe that our punishment would one day come to an end, and that I would find you in that country of which you must have whispered when you left me in my sleep that Christmas night. Did you not tell me,

sweetheart, that I must seek you in this strange land, *east of the sun and west of the moon*?"

The potent words had no sooner crossed his lips than his loved one awakened from her languor. She rose to her feet, raised her eyes, and, seeing her devoted lover, with the sweetest of glad cries she sprang forward to welcome him fondly. Words came again to her lips, joy took possession of her soul, and she became, as of old, a light-hearted swan-maiden, radiant with love and happiness.

But it was not to his beloved alone that John brought deliverance. The spell that bound all the dwellers in that country of lost loves was broken, once for all, when the name of the land, *east of the sun and west of the moon*, was uttered by one whose devotion had led him, through countless toils and perils, to win back his sweetheart from that silent, gloomy life. One and all awoke now to enjoy renewed speech and laughter, and to praise the constancy of the Norwegian, who had rested not until he had accomplished the journey, which no other mortal ever undertook of his own free will.